

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick

Permanent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/110966>

Copyright and reuse:

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it.

Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk

Social Media and Democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan since 2003

By

Munir Hasan Mohammad

A thesis

**submitted to University of Warwick in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

July 2018

Abstract

A considerable amount of literature examines the impact of the Internet and social media on the practice of democracy in liberal democratic contexts and on the democratization process in nondemocratic contexts. However, little is known about the rise and implications of using the Internet and social media platforms for democratization process in a hybrid political system, like that of Iraqi Kurdistan, which combines elements of both democracy and authoritarianism. This study asks: how does the rise of the Internet and social media platforms influence democracy and democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan? To this end, the study assesses both the relationship between the use of social media platforms by citizens, politicians, electoral candidates, and political parties, as well as political participation and political communication, which are selected as important elements of democratization. It specifically examines the use of social media through three case studies: the Slemani protest movement in 2011; political discussion between citizens and party leaders of two political parties, the Patriotic union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU); and the 2013 parliamentary elections. The study is based on original qualitative interviews with activists, politicians, and party leaders, and an analysis of relevant social media content in the Kurdish language, especially on the social media platform, Facebook. The thesis finds that social media platforms facilitate political participation and political communication in terms of reducing the constraints for organizing and coordinating collective action. They also facilitate political discussion between party leaders and citizens, and provide more access to relevant information for citizens. Furthermore, they expand the scope of freedom of speech by providing opportunities to discuss political

issues and other issues of common interest, and facilitate the dissemination of information by electoral candidates and reduce campaign costs. However, the thesis argues that the increasing ease of political participation and political communication, as a result of social media usage, should not be equated with democratization. This is because those in power also use social media but in ways that are counter-productive to democratization. For example, security forces use social media to monitor and gather information about citizens and social movement activists; Political parties and their leaders also use online and social media platforms to distribute pro-party propaganda and to launch online attacks on political rivals, spreading a culture of hatred, violence and nondemocratic values, rather than promoting the discussion of policy issues and government decisions. Election candidates use online resources primarily to win a seat in parliament and empower their campaign rather than engaging with voters in a way that generates productive, healthy, rational, and deep political conversation.

Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------------|------|
| Declaration..... | vii |
| Acknowledgments..... | viii |
| List of Abbreviations..... | ix |

Chapter 1

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| 1 The Research Background and Rationale..... | 1 |
| 1.1 A Background to Iraqi Kurdistan and Politics | 2 |
| 1.2 Significance of the Internet and Social Media for Iraqi Kurdistan | 7 |
| 2 The Research Questions and Objectives | 15 |
| 3 The Thesis Argument..... | 16 |
| 4 Thesis Structure and an Outline of the Chapters..... | 18 |

Chapter 2

| | |
|---|----|
| The Internet, Social Media, Democracy, and Democratization: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology | 23 |
| 1 Introduction | 23 |
| 1.1 Democracy and Democratization | 24 |
| 1.2 Social Media | 35 |
| 2 Literature Review..... | 36 |
| 2.1 Social Media and Democracy in Democratic States | 36 |
| 2.2 Social Media and Democracy in Authoritarian States | 43 |
| 3 Impact of the Internet and Social Media on Democratization | 47 |
| 3.1 Political Participation | 49 |
| 3.1.1 Political Participation as an Influencing Attempt | 51 |
| 3.1.2 Political Participation as Political Discussion | 60 |
| 3.2 Political Communication | 69 |
| 4 Methodology..... | 78 |
| 4.1 The Epistemological and Methodological Paradigm | 79 |
| 4.2 The Research Design | 83 |
| 4.3 Methods of Data Collection | 86 |
| 4.4 Considerations of Ethical Issues | 89 |
| 4.5 The Data Analysis | 91 |

Chapter 3

| | |
|---|----|
| Democracy and Democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan: an Overview | 93 |
|---|----|

| | | |
|--------------|--|------------|
| 1 | Introduction | 93 |
| 1.1 | The Creation of IK | 93 |
| 1.2 | The 1991 Kurdish Uprising | 96 |
| 2 | The Challenges of the Democratization Process in IK (1991-2003)..... | 98 |
| 3 | Democracy and Democratization in IK: 2003 and beyond..... | 106 |
| 3.1 | IK's Democratic Features | 106 |
| 3.2 | Failures of Democratic Transformation in IK | 107 |
| 3.2.1 | Power Sharing | 108 |
| 3.2.2 | Peaceful Transition of Power | 110 |
| 3.2.3 | Institutionalization and the Power of Democratic Institutions | 113 |
| 3.2.4 | Corruption and Failed Administration | 115 |
| 3.2.5 | The Rule of Law and Accountability | 119 |
| 3.2.6 | Media and Freedom of Speech | 122 |
| 4 | The Emerging Change Movement (Bzutnaway Goran) and the Opposition Front | 126 |
| 5 | Conclusion | 131 |

Chapter 4

| | | |
|--|---|------------|
| Social Media, Social Movements and Democratization: The Case of the Slemani Movement in 2011..... | | 132 |
| 1 | Introduction | 132 |
| 2 | Understanding the Slemani Movement in 2011: Context and Development | 134 |
| 2.1 | The Implications of the Arab Spring | 134 |
| 3 | The Impact of Social Media on the Slemani Movement | 142 |
| 3.1 | Social Media, Communication, Mobilization, and Coordination strategies in the Slemani Movement | 143 |
| 3.2 | Social Media, Citizen Journalism and the Spread of Information in the Slemani Movement | 149 |
| 3.3 | The Risks of Social Media to the Slemani Movement | 156 |
| 4 | Conclusion | 161 |

Chapter 5

| | | |
|--|---|------------|
| Social Media, Political Discussion, and the Kurdish Political Parties: The Case of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) | | 164 |
| 1 | Introduction | 164 |
| 2 | A Brief Background about the PUK and the KIU | 166 |
| 2.1 | The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) | 166 |
| 2.1.1 | The Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU)..... | 168 |

| | | |
|--------------|---|------------|
| 3 | The PUK, the KIU, the Internet, Social Media, and Political discussion | 171 |
| 3.1 | The Online Background of Both Parties | 171 |
| 3.1.1 | The PUK..... | 171 |
| 3.1.2 | The KIU..... | 174 |
| 3.2 | The Internet, Social Media, and Political Discussion: the PUK and the KIU in Comparative Perspective | 178 |
| 3.2.1 | Party Websites | 178 |
| 3.2.2 | Party Leaders' Pages and Accounts | 181 |
| 3.2.3 | Pro-Party Pages and Accounts..... | 190 |
| 4 | Conclusion | 197 |

Chapter 6

| | | |
|--|---|------------|
| Social Media, Elections, and Campaigns: The Case of the Kurdistan Parliamentary Elections in 2013 | | 201 |
| 1 | Introduction | 201 |
| 2 | The 2013 Parliamentary Elections: A New Era in Kurdish Politics..... | 203 |
| 3 | Social Media and the 2013 Elections..... | 208 |
| 3.1 | Positive Implications of Social Media for Elections and Campaigns | 208 |
| 3.1.1 | Publishing and Sharing Information and Communicating Messages... | 208 |
| 3.2 | Implications of Online Campaign for Traditional Media | 212 |
| 3.2.1 | Implications for Networking and Interactivity | 216 |
| 3.3 | Negative Implications of Social Media for Elections and Campaigns | 222 |
| 4 | Conclusion | 227 |

Chapter 7

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Findings of the study | 231 |
|------------------------------------|------------|

Chapter 8

| | |
|--|------------|
| Conclusion | 249 |
| 1. Implications of this Study for the Wider Study of Social Media and Democratization..... | 249 |
| 2 Implications of the study for studying social media and politics for other hybrid regimes | 253 |
| 3 Study Limitations | 255 |
| 4 Recommendations for Future Research..... | 256 |

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Bibliography..... | 259 |
|--------------------------|------------|

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Primary Sources | 259 |
| 2. Secondary Resources..... | 266 |
| Appendix | 306 |
| List of Interviewees..... | 306 |

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been entirely my own work and follows the guidelines provided in the Guide to Examinations for Higher Degree by Research of the University of Warwick. The thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university and any errors within are entirely my own.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' and 'H' followed by a horizontal line.

Munir Hasan Mohammad

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research – Kurdistan Regional Government – for granting me a scholarship and providing financial support. Without the scholarship, it would have been impossible to conduct this work.

I would like to thank both of my supervisors Dr Nicola Pratt and Dr Peter Ferdinand for their support throughout the many years of PhD, keeping me going when times were tough, asking insightful questions, and offering invaluable advice. Special thanks and gratitude to Dr Nicola Pratt for her absolute support, engagement, and advice. I would also like to thank Professor Jan Aart Scholte who was my supervisor in the first year of my PhD studies.

I would like to thank all participants in this study who dedicated their valuable time to interviews, supported my work, and helped me get results of better quality.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my family: above all my mother, my wife, Sazan, for supporting me spiritually throughout writing this thesis and my life in general. Special thanks to my lovely daughters: Yara, Alya, Rose, my son Mohammad and to all my family members who supported me in this mission.

List of Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| ICG | Iraqi Central Government |
| IHEC | Independent High Electoral Commission |
| IK | Iraqi Kurdistan |
| ISIS | Islamic State in Iraq and Syria |
| KDP | Kurdistan Democratic Party |
| KIG | Kurdistan Islamic Group |
| KIU | Kurdistan Islamic Union |
| KRG | Kurdistan Regional Government |
| KRP | Kurdistan Regional Parliament |
| MNR | Ministry of Natural Resources |
| NDRFP | Network of Defending the Rights and Freedom of people |
| PUK | Patriotic Union of Kurdistan |
| UNAMI | United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq |

Chapter 1

Introduction

This study examines the implications of social media usage for the democratization process in Iraqi Kurdistan (IK). Over the last decade, IK has witnessed a rise in the use of social media and digital platforms, which have begun to influence various aspects of the Kurdish society. Since 1991, the Iraqi-Kurdistan region has faced many challenges in the process of consolidating the democratization process. Despite the interest in social media and democracy in the Middle East that has resulted from the Arab uprisings of 2011, thus far, there have been no studies assessing the role of social media in the process of democratization and democratic consolidation in IK. This chapter contains four sections: 1) a background to the research subject and the rationale for this study; 2) statement of the research questions and objectives; 3) a statement of the thesis argument; and 4) a brief outline of each chapter.

1 The Research Background and Rationale

This section provides an introduction to Iraqi Kurdistan, its political institutions and processes, and the significance of social media in political life. It then discusses the rationale for this study.

1.1 A Background to Iraqi Kurdistan and Politics

IK is not an independent state; according to article 4 of the Iraqi constitution, it is a federal region within Iraq, and consists of three provinces (Erbil, Slemani, and Duhok). In practice however, the region operates like an independent state and Deniz Natali (2010) described it as the ‘Kurdish Quasi-State’ (Natali, 2010). The region has great authority in arranging its economic and commercial policies and activities with many states around the world independently of the Iraqi central government (ICG). Most recently, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) entered into contracts with several giant energy companies, such as ExxonMobil, to extract and sell oil and gas from the region, bypassing the Iraqi central government (Invest in Group, 2015). The region has its own army, known as Peshmerga, which does not operate under the command of the Iraqi central government. However, Peshmerga forces are still not nationalized and it is under the control of the two main political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party – PDK, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan – PUK. The region has its own representatives in many states, which act like ministries of foreign affairs. They can offer visa entry to the region independently of the Iraqi government. In terms of military cooperation, many states deal with IK independently of the Iraqi government. The war between the Kurdistan region and Islamic state in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2014 is a prominent example of such cooperation.

The political system of IK is not consolidated yet, and because the region has not ratified a constitution, it is hard to clearly and formally identify the nature of its political system. Since 1991, the region has operated according to a parliamentary system, with its own parliament, government (prime minister and president), and

judiciary system. Additionally, every province has its own local government, known as the council of governorate. Citizens in the region elect these local governorates.

The major political parties in IK are divided into secularists and Islamists. The secularist parties are: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the Change Movement (Goran). The Islamist parties are: the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), and the Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG). As well as these major parties, there are other small parties, which have a very limited influence on the political landscape in IK.

Since the Kurdish uprising against the Baathist regime in 1991, IK began to establish democratic governance. The first step of the process towards this was organizing the first parliamentary election in 1992 in order to establish the Kurdistan Regional government (KRG).

An examination of the political landscape in IK has shown that the region has elements of both democratic and authoritarian rule, a political regime best described as a 'hybrid regime'. Scholars disagree on what exactly defines a hybrid regime. Different terminologies such as 'pseudodemocratic' (Diamond, 2002), 'competitive authoritarian' (Levitsky & Way, 2010), defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism (Bogaards, 2009) dominate academic literature. In conceptualising this type of political regime, Larry Diamond argues that it combines both democratic and authoritarian elements (Diamond, 2002). According to Levitsky and Way, competitive regimes combine electoral competition with varying degrees of authoritarianism. In these type of regimes, opposition forces have the opportunity and freedom to use democratic institutions to compete and contest with incumbents. However, they were not truly democratic because

the competition is unfair and electoral manipulation, unfair media access, abuse of state resources, and depending on violence and harassment during political game in favour of incumbents is rife throughout the system (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Furthermore, Bogaards argues that there are some essential norms for democracy and fundamental democratic institutions: freedom, equality, and control and limitation of political power. Moreover, democratic institutions are decision-making intermediations, communication, legal guarantees, and rulemaking and implementation. If these norms and institutions are not fully in existence and achieved by a political regime, then the regime can be described as ‘defective democracy’ (Bogaards, 2009). Additionally, Ottaway defined hybrid regimes as “ambiguous systems that combine rhetorical acceptance of liberal democracy, the existence of some formal democratic institutions and respect for a limited sphere of civil and political liberties with essentially illiberal or even authoritarian traits” (Ottaway, 2003:10). A common understanding among scholars for the concept rests on idea that this type of regime contains features of democracy and authoritarianism simultaneously.

Empirically, in regard to its political pluralism, elections, democratic institutions, civil society groups, and media corporations, IK appears to be democratic. There is freedom for forming political groups and civil societies, organising elections, although they are not conducted regularly, separation of powers between legislation, executive, and judiciary, diversity in media. However, in other aspects, IK is closer to an authoritarian system. The accesses to state resources are not equally accessible to all political parties. The two main political parties, the KDP and the PUK dominate key sectors of government resources and institutions, namely finance, economy, the media,

police, and armed forces, to the exclusion of other political parties. This domination reflects on many aspects of the region's democratic process. For example, the two main parties rigged elections many times in their favour. The democratic consolidation process in IK was also challenged by the outbreak of civil war between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which divided the Kurdistan region into two separate political administrations. Other challenges to the process include the intervention of political parties in government institutions which weakened the rule of law and spread corruption and nepotism; monopolisation of economic, natural, and financial resources by the two main parties; human rights and freedom of speech violations; and the politicization of the media and civil society (Orsam, 2013).

In practice, political power is monopolised by the KDP and the PUK. Government institutions are politicized and strongly intertwined with the two parties. According to Qadir (2007):

In IK today, political party control extends down into the high schools and universities. Student unions are financed by political parties and act as their extensions. The KDP and PUK student groups act as eyes and ears for the security services of the two parties. They observe students and professors and submit reports of activities to their supervisors (Qadir, 2007: 21).

Both parties have their own militaries and security apparatus are not nationalized. The KDP and the PUK still control economic activities. They use these

government resources to promote their political agenda, strengthening the economic and political position of their political parties (Stansfield, 2003; Orsam, 2013).

Official institutions, such as parliament, which has weak decision-making powers, are largely ineffective. Instead of parliament or government bodies, the respective political bureaus of the KDP and the PUK make the most important decisions: both parties have paralyzed parliament on multiple occasions. The judiciary system in the region is also ineffective: the rule of law is weak. The general attorney apparatus cannot prosecute high-ranking officials inside the KDP and PUK for many crimes committed or corruption issues (Orsam, 2013).

Freedom of expression is limited; this is in part due to the politicization of the majority of the mainstream media: often, they either directly or indirectly belong to specific political parties or famous politicians. Political parties use the mainstream media to communicate with citizens and typically prioritize the interests of the political party over the interests of the public in their media coverage (Chomani, 2014). The independent media have a very narrow space to thrive and cannot play their role as effectively as they could in a democratic government; they have limited access to information sources. In IK, independent media and journalists face many challenges and are harassed, and threatened with arrest and even death. Most importantly, the region has a negative reputation in guaranteeing freedom of speech and press. The United States State Department report on human rights in Iraq has documented tens of cases of killing, arrest and imprisonment of journalists, human rights activists and independent figures without legal warrant (U.S. Department of State, 2015). Additionally, IK has a

poor record of human rights violations, such as killing females in the name of ‘honour’ and the rights of prisoners (Orsam, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2013).

1.2 Significance of the Internet and Social Media for Iraqi Kurdistan

The arrival of the Internet in IK in 2000 was an important technological development. It was available in IK before any other parts of Iraq (Internews Europe, 2012). Although it was a very new medium for the Kurdish society and very few citizens had access to it, the Internet connected the Kurdish society with globalization trends, the global economy, and culture. This was important because it brought new social, cultural, and even political values and norms into Kurdish society (Sheyholislami, 2011).

After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, IK entered a new phase of economic investments in various sectors. Due to having security, the region succeeded in expanding investment in communication infrastructure, including the Internet and mobile networks; this increased Iraq's reliance on IK for Internet connectivity to reach three-quarters of Iraqi networks (Smith, 2014). Even when the Iraqi central government, on many occasions, blocked social media and other Internet services due to recent violence, IK, through its Internet infrastructure and networks reconnected the whole of Iraq with the global Internet (*Dyn Research*, 2014). In 2013, there were 21 Internet service providers (ISP) in IK alone (*Ekurd daily*, 2013).

With regard to social media platforms, IK has witnessed a rapid growth of social media memberships on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube; this has attracted both political and non-political public figures to engage with and employ them for political

and non-political purposes. Existing research suggests that use of the Internet and social media has significantly increased in recent years, especially among Kurdish youths and politicians (Internews Europe, 2012; Hogan and Trumpbour, 2013). Another study conducted by IREX in 2012 found that nearly 50% of people in the Kurdistan region use social media at least once per week, and 72% of Iraqi Facebook users are between 18-34 years old. Facebook is the most visited website in Iraq followed by other types of social media such as Twitter and YouTube (Invest in Group, 2012). Additionally, a BBG study (2014) revealed that:

Facebook is by far the most popular social networking site, with almost all social media users (94.3%) having accessed it. The next most popular are Google+ at 41.8% and Twitter at 25.8% (BBG, 2015).

Furthermore, the World Bank estimated that approximately 11.3% of the population used the Internet in 2014, compared with 5% in 2011 (U.S. Department of State, 2015). These findings indicate that social media usage in IK is growing day after day, and they also explain that Facebook is the most popular website and this popularity is among youth rather than other social sectors.

In IK, the majority of the political parties have websites and politicians have Facebook and Twitter accounts or pages. They use the Internet and social media to establish communication and convey their political message to voters and followers, both during and outside election periods. This seems to be a timely development because it offers citizens the opportunity to interact with the political parties and the candidates over political issues. Furthermore, party members and citizens outside of the

political party structure communicate with the party leaders through social media to discuss the political agenda with top political leaders. Additionally, there are countless pro-party accounts and pages that support political parties by republishing statements, interviews and media activities of party leaders, publishing contents that enhancing political position of political parties and empower party's political image in public mind.

At the citizen level, social media appear to be the most popular means of communication to resolve political issues. For example, in 2011, Kurdish citizens in Slemani used social media to mobilize other citizens to demonstrate against corruption and demand the KRG should carry out social and political reforms. Additionally, social media appear to be rapidly integrating with political dynamics in IK. For example, on 10 October 2015 due to the recent economic and financial crises in IK, a huge number of citizens organized protest in front of the KDP office in Qaladze town, Slemani province. The protests turned into a violence clash between protesters and KDP cadres and resulted in protesters burning the KDP office in Qaladze and killing one protester and some KDP cadres. Consequently, on 12 October 2015, Masud Barzani, the KDP president and the KDP politburo decided to prevent speaker of parliament, Yousuf Mohammad Sadiq – Goran List, from returning to Erbil (Rudaw, 2015). Accounts on social media platforms, such as 'Roj Gul Facebook page'¹ were very active in Qaladze events. This particular page published many provocative videos of killings and burned KDP offices. In late 2016 and early 2017, teachers in the Slemani provinces and other towns organized massive strikes, demanding the KRG to pay their salaries and improve their lives (Rudaw, 2017). In these strikes, social media platforms were actively used to

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/RojgullTV/?fref=ts>

mobilise, organize, and inform people in IK about their activities. Social media has also enabled citizens to communicate their grievances with local governing bodies, forming public opinions to put pressure on KRG officials to improve economic and political situations, and human rights conditions in IK. Additionally, citizens and journalists post official documents about corruption and human rights abuse on social media accounts and on some occasions the government responds to public opinion formed through social media.

By observing social media accounts in IK, it is possible to claim that social media has become a platform on which citizens can deliberate, discuss and exchange political ideas online. Even traditional media outlets have created online pages, allowing users to discuss their opinions and political views. For example, NRT Media Network² has several political show programs. Tawtwe (analysis) is one of NRT daily political show invites citizens to participate in the discussion by writing comments and questions for program guests through NRT's Facebook page,³ which has more than 2 million Likes. Rudaw Media Network,⁴ another media corporation, similarly has a political show called Rudawi Amro (event of today). The show invites users to write comments and questions for the show's guests on its Facebook page,⁵ which has more than 2 million Likes. This importantly enables citizens to participate and frame political issues; Ruwayda Mustafah⁶ highlighted that:

² <http://www.nrttv.com/>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/naliatv/>

⁴ <http://www.rudaw.net/Sorani>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/Rudaw.net/?fref=ts>

⁶ Kurdish Female Blogger

Mainstream outlets are not framing the discourse, but are being framed on the basis of what social networking users are discussing, debating or highlighting (Mustafah, 2015).

Through publishing posts and comments on the political and social contents of other users, citizens can express their opinions and interact with other social media users, government officials, political leaders and parliament members. More recently, online platforms have become another sphere on which to discuss politics, which is framed differently online, compared to other forms of communication technologies such as mainstream media. On social media accounts and platforms, political issues are generally discussed in an informal style, with comments often using aggressive and rude language. What can be said and read in social media platforms certainly cannot be said and read anywhere else. The structure of online platforms encourages users to produce and share as much information as possible with others even if the information is capable of influencing beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour. Additionally, the Internet and social media platforms played a key role in the Kurdish election campaigns. Due to social media's simple user interface, politicians and candidates used these online platforms extensively in the recent parliamentary elections to advance their campaigns and communicate with voters.

In response to the growth of online space, the KRG party's security apparatus reacted against the online sphere in IK. According to the United States State Department 2015 report on human rights in Iraq, in IK

There were overt government restrictions on access to the Internet, and there were credible reports, but no official

acknowledgement, that the government monitored e-mail and Internet communications without appropriate legal authority. Despite restrictions, political figures and activists used the Internet to criticize corrupt and ineffective politicians, mobilize protesters for demonstrations, and campaign for candidates through social media channels (U.S. Department of State, 2015: 32).

With the growing use of the Internet and social media platforms by individuals across the globe, scholars are seeking to evaluate the emerging relationship between social media usage and political participation and political communication, such as voting, protesting and democratic deliberation (Fox and Ramos, 2012; Anduiza et al, 2012; Uldam and Vestergaard, 2015). Scholars of democracy believe that political participation and political communication concepts are the main pillar of a democratic system and significant factor of democratization. Political participation enables citizens to communicate their preferences and concerns with government officials and to put pressure on government officials and policy makers. Political participation and political communication can enable the enhancement of democracy in a particular society. Social movements, as a type of political participation, can topple authoritarian regimes and establish a more democratic political system. Political discussion between citizens, politicians, political party leaders, and their political representatives in parliament can be influential in shaping government behaviour and make government more accountable and responsive to the public's opinion and demands. Citizens' participation in election

campaigns can lead to the election of a candidate capable of implementing comprehensive reform in government and political system. The democratic system allows citizens to express their views, opinions, and attitudes towards public affairs and issues affecting them without fear of any governmental restrictions. It also allows citizens to receive responses from their representatives and policy makers. Therefore, scholars claim that it is impossible to have a democracy or democratization without active and voluntarily participation of citizens in political life and a substantial communication process between citizens and government officials. Political participation and political communication may come with different forms and types e.g. voting, participation in elections and campaign, demonstrating, striking, writing petitions, participate in civil society organization and independent political groups (Dahl, 1989; Verba et al, 1995; Uldam and Vestergaard, 2015).

With the arrival of the Internet and social media platforms, the status of political participation and political communication witnessed a dramatic transformation across societies. The general view is that digital age has transformed political participation and political communication across political systems. Yet, there is continued debate among scholars concerning the implications of the Internet for political participation and democracy (Best and Wade, 2009). Generally, two lines of arguments are suggested: the first argues that the Internet and social media platforms are valuable tools for enhancing and increasing citizens' participation and communication in political life. The Internet-based applications are new resources for organizing, mobilising, and coordinating collective actions e.g. protest, demonstration, and strikes capable of toppling governments. The Internet and online resources are considered to be valuable tools to

directly connect citizens with politicians without relying on third party mediation, such as mainstream media. Online platforms also transformed elections and campaigns by opening new channels for citizens to engage with campaigns and candidates. The online platforms empowered candidates to better communicate their message and target voters (Bennett et al, 2008; Brundidge and Rice, 2009; Rahimi, 2011; Kwon et al, 2011; Shirky, 2011; Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011; Yahyanejad and Gheytnchi, 2012; Jensen and Anduiza, 2012; Colombo et al, 2012; Castells, 2012; Towner, 2012; Lopes, 2014; Breuera et al, 2014). The second argument maintains that the Internet and social media applications are not bringing new changes that favour of democratic consolidation because nondemocratic regimes are also using these online resources to further empower their rules. They place the public sphere under surveillance and monitor activists and citizens, enhancing propaganda strategies by publishing pro-government contents online (Aday et al, 2010; Morozov, 2011; Morozov, 2012).

Despite the growing importance of social media in IK, until now, there has been no research on the significance of the Internet and social media platforms for democratization in the Kurdish context. In general, research on social media and politics in the Middle East has focused on the use of social media in challenging dictatorships by organizing collective action, and enabling dissent and counter publics (Castells, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013; Faris and Rahimi, 2015). However, challenging dictatorships cannot be equated with the process of democratization, though it could be the first step towards democratization. Therefore, this study sheds light on the implications of using social media platforms for democratization by focusing on the case of Iraqi Kurdistan. Because of its hybrid political system, the IK is an interesting

case for examining the potentiality of the Internet and social media for democratic consolidation in a nascent democracy.

2 The Research Questions and Objectives

The preceding discussions about the existence of social media in IK generate the following research questions:

How does the rise of the Internet and social media platforms influence the democratization process in IK?

1. How does the rise of social media influence political participation of citizens and what is the value of that participation for democratic consolidation in IK? What are the benefits and risks of social media for political participation and the democratization process in IK?
2. How do social media platforms facilitate citizens' participation in social movements and collective actions? How do social media influence freedom of expression and opinion? What are the implications of these actions for consolidating democracy in IK?
3. How do the Internet and social media contribute to generating political discussion and interactivity between the Kurdish citizens and political parties and their leaders? What are the implication of online resources for democratic discussion and consolidating democracy in IK?
4. How far do social media democratize the campaigns and communication strategies of candidates and political parties during elections? How do social media platforms enhance citizens' engagement with elections and campaigns? What are the implications of online campaigns for democratic consolidation in IK?

This thesis aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the impact of social media on citizens' political participation.
2. To assess the impact of social media on political communication.
3. To assess the impact of social media on political discussion and democratic deliberation between citizens and party leaders and government officials in IK.

3 The Thesis Argument

Among democracy scholars, the rise of the Internet and social media encouraged new waves of debate about the potential these online resources have to facilitate political participation and, consequently, enhance democratic consolidation or improve the quality of democracy. Generally, as Chapter Two explains in detail, there are two lines of argument on this issue; the first claims that the Internet and social media are new resources for increasing political participation and facilitating political communication, thereby contributing to democratization and democratic consolidation. Social media facilitate participation in demonstration, protest by enhancing citizens' capacities to coordinate, inform, and publicise their collective action. Social media enable citizens to better engage with elections and campaigns and also enable candidates to better communicate their message and enhance their campaign and political image. The online resources are valuable tools, which can connect citizens with politicians and increase levels of interactivity and generate productive discussion over political issues. The second line of argument emphasizes that the Internet and social media do not change the current status of politics and democracy much. Politicians can easily manipulate the public by using social media platforms in the way they would

traditionally use mainstream media: in a unidirectional approach. Social media can be new sources for government officials and representatives to reassert their power and influence over politics. The differences between scholars' opinions can be attributed to differences in the contexts in which social media has been examined. Therefore, due to various factors, it is difficult to establish a generalizable and clear-cut explanation and interpretation about the power of the Internet and social media in fostering democratic politics.

This thesis argues that although the Internet and social media facilitate political participation and political communication in the context of IK, signs of enhancing democratic politics empowered by online citizens' participation in IK seem to be weak. The political participation and political communication facilitated by the Internet and social media platforms are not effective and may not lead to consolidate democracy in IK because of repression and harassment by the security agencies and because of the top-down approach employed by politicians and political candidates. The candidates and party leaders use the Internet and social media resources for achieving short-term objectives such as winning elections, promoting personal image, and discrediting rival politicians, rather than using them as an open space for citizens to engage with party policies and interact with the decision-making process in government institutions. Therefore, the increased political participation and political communication via the Internet and social media accounts seems to be having a limited impact on the likelihood of Kurdish policy makers enabling reforms and enhance the efficacy and quality of democratic governance in IK.

4 Thesis Structure and an Outline of the Chapters

The thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter two contains four sections; the first section is dedicated to the concepts of democracy, democratization, and social media. It also develops a multi-level understanding for democratization, which this thesis adopted as a base for the conceptual framework. The second section is dedicated to reviewing the literature on the Internet, social media, and democracy and identifying thesis' contribution to knowledge. The section will review three bodies of literature. The first is literature on social media and democracy in democratic states. The second body is literature on social media and democratization in authoritarian states. Finally, the third body is literature about politics and democracy in IK, which has gaps in identifying the impact of social media on this particular field.

The third section engages with developing a theoretical framework for the study. The theoretical framework begins by developing a concept of political participation and political communication for the purpose of this thesis and then highlights the implications of the Internet and social media platforms on these concepts. The thesis then proposes to operationalize the concept of democratization through the concepts of political participation and political communication. For the concept of political participation, the study uses Jan Teorell's (2006) classification of political participation. Teorell classified the concept of political participation into three categories; the first category of political participation is participation as influencing attempt, the second is political participation as direct decision-making, and the third category is political participation as political discussion (Teorell, 2006). The thesis also uses the concept of political communication in relation to democratization. It then explains how social

media may improve or increase political participation and political communication, thus, contributing to democratization. These theoretical underpinnings will be used and operationalized on three case studies to examine the role of social media in enhancing democratic consolidation in IK. The final section addresses the methodological issues of this thesis. This section clarifies the research design, methods of data collection, ethical considerations, and data analysis. It also explains the operationalization of conceptual framework in relations to the empirical chapters.

Chapter three consists of an overview of democracy and the democratization process in IK. The aim of this chapter is to familiarize the reader with how democracy emerged, what is the status of the democratization process, and identifies the major challenges to democratic consolidation in IK. The chapter explores the elements of democracy that are available in IK, such as pluralism, parliament, government, judiciary bodies, tolerance of different religious, political and cultural factions. However, it also explores the challenges IK faces in democratization process and it has critical problems in power-sharing, peaceful transition of power, transparency, rampant corruption and weak economy, role of media and freedom of expression, and rule of law. The chapter concludes with establishing that IK is at the crossroads on democracy, and its future of democratization is uncertain.

Chapter four is concerned with the impact of social media on political participation as influencing attempt and explores the case of citizen participation in the Slemani protest movement in 2011, which called for democratic political reforms in IK. These protests were the largest organized in IK, and coincided with the waves of protests and revolutions in the Arab world, known as the Arab Spring. Drawing on

original interviews and relevant social media accounts, this chapter examines the use of social media by the Slemani protesters, its success in mobilising a popular movement for political reform, and the degree of which the protests were successful in influencing IK's politics. The chapter first explores the environment in which the Slemani movement emerged and the major factors that contributed in sparking the protests. Then, by using theoretical assumptions developed in chapter two attempts to analyse the role of social media platforms in facilitating protest participation by providing a forum for communication, coordination, and spreading news about the protests. It also analyses the major risks and drawbacks of the online platforms for the Slemani movement. The chapter finds that although social media platforms were important resources in facilitating citizens' participation in the Slemani movement and conducting several significant functions for running the movement for more than two months, the party security forces, the KDP and the PUK, also actively used the online resources to monitoring and arresting activists and movement leaders, demonizing the movement and its message, and publishing pro-KDP and PUK propaganda. Ultimately, the Slemani movement had limited influence on the KRG's political behaviour and decision-making and, thus, limited influence on further consolidating democracy in IK.

Chapter five explores the potential impacts of social media on generating political discussion between citizens and politicians, including political party members, party leaders, parliamentary representatives and government officials, as well as the role of social media in facilitating citizens' participation in political discussion. This chapter considers the PUK and the KIU as case studies and examines the role of the party websites, social media accounts and pages of the party leaders and pro-party accounts in

generating political discussion and opportunities for citizens to participate in the formulation of government policies and decision making process. This chapter also provides a brief background about both political parties and their online profile. It then explores the significance of the Internet and social media for political discussion between citizens and party leaders, politicians, parliamentary representatives and government officials. To this end, it studies three different types of online sites: party websites, Facebook accounts and pages of political leaders, and those set up by pro-party individuals. The chapter finds that rather than using online resources for generating political discussions with citizens, political parties and their leaders are using the Internet and social media applications in a unidirectional way to publish propaganda, promote party leaders and their message. There is limited evidence that the Internet and social media are generating rational, deep, and productive conversation between citizens and political parties on policy and governance issues, government decisions, and law proposals. The main purpose of the usage is to achieve personal gains rather than establishing an online democratic forum for exchanging ideas on politics in Kurdistan.

Chapter six assesses the relationship between the Internet and social media usage and political communication by focusing on political campaigns and elections. The chapter mainly concentrates on the Kurdistan parliamentary elections of 2013. Drawing on original interviews and relevant social media accounts, the chapter investigates the impact of social media on electioneering and campaigning. It examines the significance of the 2013 parliamentary elections for Kurdish politics generally. The results of the election illustrate that the balance of power among Kurdish political parties has changed

and the KDP and the PUK are no longer the only kingmakers in Kurdish politics. The chapter analysis how the Internet and social media influenced candidates' campaigning strategies and the degree to which candidates used online platforms to improve their political responsiveness to the concerns and issues of voters, thereby facilitating citizen participation in decision-making processes as well as political discussions. The chapter concludes that although the online platforms opened a new space for citizens' participation and engagement with elections, campaigns, and candidates, but candidates are using social media platforms for self-promotion, enhance their political personality, and win a seat in parliament, rather than engaging in democratic conversation or increase citizens influence over the election and campaigning process.

Chapter seven outlines the major findings of the study that the study has reached at the end of the research. Chapter eight discusses the conclusion of the study and it engages mainly with the implication of the findings for wider study of social media and democratisation.

Chapter 2

The Internet, Social Media, Democracy, and Democratization: Literature Review, Theoretical Framework, and Methodology

1 Introduction

This chapter examines the major relevant literature and develops a theoretical framework to guide the thesis and build analysis for the empirical chapters. With the advent of social media platforms, scholars in different parts of the world have started to examine to the role of these platforms for politicians and citizens, and their capabilities in achieving democratic transition. This chapter first reviews the literature on the Internet, social media, and democratization in both democratic and authoritarian contexts. It then highlights the importance of studying the role of social media in democratic consolidation in the context of IK and the potential scholarly contribution of such research. Then, it defines basic concepts, e.g. political participation and political communication, and develops the study's theoretical underpinnings by combing concepts from democratic theories with insights from the Internet and social media literature. Additionally, the chapter engages with explaining methodological issues and how the theoretical framework will be operationalized through empirical chapters.

1.1 Democracy and Democratisation

Like many other political concepts in political science, the concept of democracy and democratisation, identifying the conditions of democratisation, measuring democracy, and analysing prospects and different dimensions of democracy are highly contested themes. Scholars of the field not only struggled to propose a unanimous definition, but their efforts to formulate one were resisted and faced challenges from all sides. Defining the concept as a type of government where citizens possess power themselves or through elected representatives (Spinner, 2011; Grigsby, 2012; Ishiyama, 2012) is subject to various explanations and interpretations. However, in a general sense, it is important to look at the concept of democracy from different angles rather than limiting it with one point of view. Therefore, it is possible to conceptualise democracy and democratisation from two main perspectives; conceptualisation from a procedural perspective, and conceptualisation by outcome or result perspective.

With respect to the first perspective, procedural perspective, this approach is sometimes described as a realistic approach as it emphasises the process of democracy and democratisation as a political regime or method (Møller & Skaaning, 2013). The roots of this perspective trace back to Max Weber and Hans Kelson and its prominent defenders of this perspective are Joseph Schumpeter, Robert Dale, and O'Donnell (Møller & Skaaning, 2013). For these scholars, a democratic government has three fundamental properties: electoral rights (Schumpeter, 1994), political/civil rights (Dale, 1989), and rule of law (O'Donnell, 2001). For instance, Schumpeter (1994) defined democracy as an:

Institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions, in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the peoples vote (Schumpeter, 1994:269).

Similarly, Robert Dahl (1977; 1989) suggested some criteria for democracy in which some of them can be included under the three aforementioned properties. He believed that democracy is a type of political system where citizens have the opportunity to: (1) formulate their preferences; (2) signify their preferences to their fellow citizens and the government; and (3) have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of government; (4) effective participation, which means that all members of society must have an opportunity to present their views about policy proposals before they are implemented; (5) voting equality which denotes that no one should be excluded from voting and their vote must be counted honestly and accurately; (6) enlightened understanding, citizens must have a chance to learn about alternative government policies and their outcomes for their life in an open and transparent sphere; (7) control over political agenda, meaning that citizens have leverage over government initiatives e.g. referenda which grants them power to show public support for government policies; and (8) inclusion of adults, which means all social groups of society should be included in the governance process with no deprivation and discrimination of any of them (Dahl, 1977; 1989).

Additionally, Linz and Stepan (1996) addressed four main components to recognise democracy in any regime: (1) rule of law, meaning no individuals including government officials and rulers stand above the law; (2) civil society groups and

institutions autonomous from the state structure represent and articulate public's interest without restrictions of state power; (3) free and fair elections; (4) the extent to which government officials are held accountable (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

Some other scholars concentrate on other fundamental criteria in a given political system to be considered as a democracy. Some of these criteria are procedural criteria for democracy and democratisation, while other are principles. According to Grigsby (2012),

The rule of 'demos' is brought together through (1) elections in which the people are free to select and reject government officials, (2) ongoing access to the government by the people between elections, and (3) the enactment of laws and policies reflecting the interests of a self-governing people, it is clear that the people and the government are connected in terms of inputs (citizens demands), and outputs, (laws and policies) (Grigsby, 2012:163-4).

Furthermore, some authors argue that there should be a broader understanding of democracy rather than simply identifying participation, such as voting. In democratic governance, citizens and their representatives should have democratic oversight of government bureaucracies, military institutions. Arguably, democracy is:

A method of governing an association, a form of governance through which the people rule by means of

political procedures upon which they commonly agree
(Margolis & Riaño, 2009:6).

The power of citizens and their representatives should include both the ability to preserve traditional liberal principles and impose standards and rules for non-government sectors to comply with to protect personal and sensitive data and to utilise human and natural resources to avoid exploiting uncontrolled resources (Margolis & Riaño, 2009).

Some scholars, such as Carothers refer to standard achievements that international community aims to accomplish during transformation from an authoritarian regime to a democratic one. These include developing a constitutional framework, holding competitive elections and establishing a competitive political party system in accordance with international standards, respecting and protecting human rights, effective and inclusive legislatures, enhancing and professionalising independent judicial authority and the courts, power devolution and decentralisation of decision making for local governments, expanding participation in civil society organisations and independent media (Carothers, 1999).

Conceptualizing democracy and democratisation from procedural perspective has many advantages. This perspective simplifying the components of democratisation and allow for agreement on what to include or exclude as criteria for democratisation. This approach contains relatively few defining characteristics easy to be assessed in various cultural, social, and political contexts to address causes and consequences of these properties for democracy and democratisation. This perspective is more

pragmatic and realistic and relatively simple to assess democratic achievements empirically.

Meanwhile, this perspective also has drawbacks and disadvantages. Although electoral rights, political/civil liberties, and rule of law are significant properties for assessing the level of democratisation in a given country, some countries, however, may achieve substantial progress with respect to elections than with respect to rule of law and civil liberties and vice-versa. However, the procedural approach does not deal with democratisation components individually, but aims to see all the elements as one package. The absence or weakness in any properties would change a democratic government to into different category of political system rather than democracy (Møller & Skaaning, 2013). Additionally, this perspective does not address issues beyond these conditions, such as the operation of democratic government and what can achieve for citizens, or as Huntington noted ‘the degree of governing’.

Another group of scholars attempt to conceptualise democracy and democratisation and judge it through the capacity of democratic government in achieving developmental goals and meeting social needs. Some authors believe that a democratic system can be distinguished by the capability of political system in achieving economic growth and development, the reducing of corruption in the economic sector, the capacity of central government in maintaining order and manage the delivery of basic public goods and services (Lipset, 1959; Schneider & Schmitter, 2004; Fukuyama, 2011).

With respect to defining democratisation, like the concept of democracy, there is no fixed and timeless objective definition for democratisation; it is subject to a

variety of understandings and interpretations. Some scholars argue that considering the role of electoral process in achievement of democratisation process, stating that democratisation means exit from authoritarianism regime and ending with peaceful transfer of government between competing political parties or acceptance of electoral process as the only game for reallocating public office. However, the problem with this understanding of democratisation is that it is too permissive for some contexts and too exacting for others (Whitehead, 2002). Some states reached a satisfactory level of institutional stability and in considering election as the only game for political process, such as in Spain and Italy, but still require substantial progress in other sectors (Whitehead, 2002). Additionally, this perspective only engages with democratisation as a process occurs within a formal institutional structure, such as electoral politics, but ignores the process from informal structure, such as social movements and civil society. Civil society must be free to operate as a condition of democracy.

A suitable definition proposed by Whitehead, who sees democratisation as “a complex, long-term, dynamic, and open-ended process. It consists of progress towards a more rule-based, more consensual and more participatory type of politics. It necessarily involves a combination of a fact and value, and so contains internal tensions” (Whitehead, 2002:27). Additionally, due to the complexity of the concept, Haynes (2012) believes that the process of democratisation in a given country needed to occur in four recognisable, complementary, and overlapping stages. The first is political liberalisation, which requires political reform in authoritarian rules. The second stage calls for collapse of authoritarian regimes and removal of dictators from power. The third is democratic transition, and requires a tangible shift to democracy,

usually identified by the democratic election of a new government. The fourth stage, called democratic consolidation, requires the entrenchment of democratic institutions and perceptions among both elites and citizens that democracy is the more favourable political approach (Haynes, 2012).

Democracy promotion and strategies are required for democratisation to flourish; this is subject to debate. Scholars propose various approaches on how best to achieve democratisation. One approach is called the sequentialist approach. The debate between those supporting the sequentialist approach and those opposing it is called the sequence/fallacy debate. Sequentialists emphasise the importance of necessary preconditions and requirements for establishment of stable democratic government or which requirements should be prioritised and put in place to build a democratic government. Scholars like Fareed Zakaria (1997), Amy Chua (1998) Mansfield and Snyder (2005; 2007), also known as sequentialists, argue that it is risky to promote democracy before having necessary preconditions are in place and that democratic designers should pay special attention to flourishing those preconditions before pushing for electoral election. In their view, it is crucial for democratic promoters to establish rule of law and build well-functioning state before moving to other mass political participation of the public in political life or organizing electoral competition (Zakaria, 1997; Chua, 1998; Mansfield & Snyder, 2005; 2007). More specifically, Mansfield and Snyder support economic development, which will naturally enhance the rule of law. Leaders in new democracies, in their view, desire to appease their citizens economically; therefore, legal system and rule of law reform is a significant element necessary for a flourished economy (Mansfield & Snyder, 2007).

Another essential precondition, sequentialists argue, that needs to be in place before starting democratisation process is having well-functioning state. Mansfield and Snyder (2007) state that state should first be capable of functioning well in terms of its security and safety for citizens, providing basic services, have monopoly on force, and of creating effective institutions before entering onto path of sustainable, pluralistic political development, holding general elections and open the space for political participation. Thus, in a post-authoritarian society where a state has completely collapsed under civil war and other negative events, it is very dangerous to push for democratisation without having a well-functioning state. Strengthening state capacity should be prioritised and democratisation must wait until there is a state with capable, impartial institutions and a solid capacity to develop, legislate, and implement effective policies (Mansfield & Snyder, 2007; 2005). While Carothers (2007) has no problem with having effective state in principle, he noted that leaders in new democracies who engage in the state building process frequently end up with building corrupt and incompetent institutions, creating patronage networks, and developing an infrastructure of weak institutions. Autocrats misuse the state apparatus as a source for gaining income for themselves through corruption and suppressing political rivals. Autocratic leaders consider an independent, impartial, strong and effective state apparatus as a threat to their rules. Moreover, in new democracies, governments struggle with state building process; for example, political parties may use state institutions to build patronage networks, and coalition governments can setback institution building and sustained policy implementation (Carothers, 2007).

Comparably, Francis Fukuyama accepts the sequentialists' view that the constrained and the capacity of the society in questions make a workable strategy. But he also accepts Carothers's argument that there is a small number of examples where state building preceded democratisation in a given country (Fukuyama, 2007).

Meanwhile, Carothers (2007) does not completely accept the sequentialists' view. He argues that experiences demonstrate that establishing those preconditions in new democracies can be difficult to be correctly carried out. Carothers (2007) warns that autocratic leaders in new democracies are often less interested in rule of law and in economic developments of their citizens; rather, they make rule of law reforms to enrich themselves, protect the economic privileges of their peers, and suppress and deprive other political rivals from economic resources. These leaders only care about holding onto power and use every means to keep their ruling alive. Even if they want to develop their country's economy, they may do so in a way that serves their interests, which ultimately compromises any serious pursuit of the rule of law. Moreover, leaders in new democracies will typically reform certain laws, such as commercial law to achieve economic development and abandon reforming laws relating to political rights and freedom (Carothers, 2007).

Besides that, autocrats sometimes mislead the public by pretending that their policies aim to reform the economy, by launching anti-corruption campaigns and anti-crime-related policies. However, these reforms are limited and avoid essential components of genuine rule of law. These anti-corruption campaigns may consist of techno-legal changes or programs for raising the public's awareness on the risks of corruption. These policies do not lead to democratisation because they are not

comprehensive in scope and/or implementation; rather, they manipulate the public and the rule of law agenda (Carothers, 2007).

Similar to Carothers, Berman (2007) also is sceptical about sequentialists' recommendations on establishing preconditions before launching democratisation and she noted that the history of European western countries demonstrate that even the existence of precondition did not guarantee peaceful transition to democracy. The histories of France, England, and Germany do not support the sequentialists' view as these countries witnessed revolution, civil war, and ethnic cleansing in a time where state institutions were in place. Even countries that Mansfield and Snyder cite as examples of successful democratisation did so after waves of military coups, storms of violence, failed democratic experiences, civil wars and occupations (Berman, 2007).

Alternatively, Carothers (2007) proposed a different path for democratisation to flourish, named as gradualism, which is different from sequence/fallacy one. He named this approach as "democratic gradualism" and explained it as:

It does not entail putting off for decades or indefinitely the core element of democratisation- the development of fair and open processes of political competition and choice. It involves reaching for the core element now, but doing so in interactive and cumulative ways rather than all at once. Gradualism can take different forms depending on the context (Carothers, 2007:25).

Carothers also admits that democratic gradualism should not be considered as a magic bullet: this can easily be misused by unfaithful leaders for democratisation. This

approach will not provide democracy promoters with new forms of influence to enhance democracy and it is not universally applicable. However, it does not mean that democracy is unachievable. Gradualism is a different approach from sequentialism as Carothers highlighted:

The gradualist approach seeks to find a way for countries where few circumstances favour democratisation to take incremental but definite steps toward open political competition while simultaneously pursuing state-building and rule-of-law reforms (Carothers (b), 2007:21).

Regarding IK, this thesis considers democratisation to be a complex and long-term process aimed at achieving political, economic, and social stability through conducting regular, impartial, and standardised elections and peaceful transitions of power, which ultimately lead to establishing a government capable of achieving the public's economic and social interests and needs. In this sense, it adopts Whitehead's definition of democratisation but also considers that the end point should include both procedural elements of democracy as well as ensuring particular outcomes in terms of delivering development and security for citizens. In line with Carothers's gradualist approach, this thesis recognizes that multi-party elections constitute a positive step towards democratisation even if, in the case of IK, they have not yet dismantled the monopoly of the two main parties, which undermines the building of strong institutions and the rule of law. Therefore, the thesis seeks to understand how social media may constitute a means through which democratisation may be strengthened,

through enhancing citizen participation to hold politicians to account and to voice demands that may, in turn, contribute to strengthening institutions and the rule of law.

1.2 Social Media

The concept of social media is relatively new, and scholars use different terminologies to describe and explain it. Some definitions concentrate on Internet applications that allow users to create content and exchange it. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as

A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012: 60).

Other scholars such as Howard and Hussain (2013) use the term digital media. They contend that digital media consists of:

(A) The information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content that has individual value but reflects shared values. (B) The content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, and ideas that becomes cultural products (Howard and Hussain, 2013: 13).

The above authors refer to the creation and exchange of content by social media users. This is important; however, the functions of social media sites go beyond this. Some authors remark on the communication dimension of social media sites: according

to Coleman and Blumler (2009), social media are set of websites with media features capable of disseminating information and facilitating multidirectional communication. In this multi-dimensional environment, small groups of people are able to influence and shape the perceptions and beliefs of an entire nation (Coleman and Blumber, 2009). Similarly, Bimber et al (2005) claim that social media are broad communication channels that provide online information for their users in a contentious political arena and offer alternative perspectives towards social issues (Bimber et al., 2005).

In summary, social media are definable as types of Internet applications that offer citizens the opportunity to send, receive, share, disseminate, exchange, and publish different types of data and information. These applications are capable of establishing and enhancing communication among humans and helping them to create communities and share feelings among users. These two features are necessary to distinguish social media from traditional media and other Internet applications.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Media and Democracy in Democratic States

Democratic states have recently witnessed an increase in the use of social media sites in political activities such as campaigning, disseminating political information and policy planning. In western democracies, social media play a growing role in presidential and parliamentary elections (Chadwick, 2006; Davis et al, 2009; Wawrd and Gibson, 2009; Hendricks and Denton, Jr, 2010; Katz et al, 2013; Rajput, 2014).

One of the problems in liberal democracies is the decline of citizens' interest and faith in parliamentary democracy, joining political parties, voting, and participation in

general politics. Consequently, citizens search for a different form of political engagement such as joining social and protest movements rather than formal political organization. However, politicians in liberal democracies search for other means, such as social media, to rejuvenate the public's interest in politics. Thus, digital technologies can be seen as promising medium to reinvigorate democracy (Coleman, 2009; Loader et al, 2014).

The examination of the role of social media in reinvigorating democracy in democratic states will begin with focusing on political campaigns and elections. Social media have a great impact on political parties and the election process. In many liberal democracies, in presidential and parliamentary elections, social media are used for campaign operations, mobilization, and fundraising. These academic works argue for the role of social media in enhancing the quality of democracy. They mainly claimed that social media opens new channels for interested citizens to engage and participate in democratic politics. They also argue that digital technologies allow marginalized and new parties to emerge and compete with the established parties and ultimately produce a more pluralistic and competitive party system. New and marginalized parties benefit from the Internet, which enables them to overcome financial constraints because it is a cheap and efficient way to reach out to voters. (Grossman, 1995; Morris, 1999; Browning, 2002; Margolis et al., 2003; Bimber and Davis, 2003; Trippi, 2004; Chadwick, 2006; Davis et al, 2009; Reddick and Aikins, 2012; Pařrut and Pařrut, 2014).

Contrastingly, some other scholars argue that the Internet will not change the basic dynamics of election campaigns. Online platforms are less likely to increase competition

among parties because wealthier parties and candidates will use the Internet in a more effective way than small and new parties. Wealthier parties will have more staff, better websites and more effective media converge for their campaigns. Ultimately, the Internet may intensify political inequalities (Davis, 1999). The Internet, according to this view, is still a tool in the hands of political elites, which enables them to manipulate the public, ultimately excluding citizens from politics. The Internet and social media do not inherently influence the political behaviours of governments, or influence laws and policies to make them more democratic (Hindman, 2009; Margolis and Riaño, 2009).

Additionally, Margolis and Riaño (2009) argue that,

Political uses of the Internet have affected aspects of democratic politics, such as electioneering and lobbying techniques, but they have hardly enhanced or furthered democracy. Even though the potential for more effective participation, greater voting equality, more enlightened understanding, and more substantive control over the political agenda certainly exists, patterns of political activity associated with the net generally reflect the predominant patterns of offline political activity (Margolis and Riaño, 2009: 151).

Another way of considering the role of social media in democratic reinvigoration in democratic states is as a way for political activists to disseminate political information. Social media and the Internet have increased the amount of information available to citizens. This process can be conducted through the official websites of the

parties, social media sites, and through personal social media accounts of politicians (Davis, 2009). The availability of information may empower parties' political communication with voters and citizens, because the availability of information is more likely to increase democratic participation. It also encourages citizens' interaction with the information because they can contribute to increasing and deliberating the information through sharing, posting, and commenting on activities via social media sites (Morris, 1999; Browning, 2002; Chadwick, 2006).

Besides political parties and politicians, recently, scholars in democratic states have become interested in citizens' engagement with social media for political participation. These studies primarily concluded that the Internet and social media have empowered citizens to participate in politics, and given voices to voiceless individuals (Lusoli and Ward, 2006; Bimber et al, 2009; Jensen and Anduiza, 2012). However, these studies concentrate on the democratization trends on individual levels rather than on institutional levels; they fail to address how citizens' empowerment influences government decisions and policies or how the Internet and social media contribute in democratizing the decision-making process of local and national governments.

Authors who have studied citizens' usage of the Internet and social media for political participation in liberal democracies agree on three basic themes. First, the Internet and social media reduce the costs of participation in terms of time and effort. Traditional forms of political participation e.g. contacting politicians, donating and signing petitions require lower costs in terms of time and effort. Individuals can easily disseminate their thoughts and information across a wide range of audiences, which

they were not able to do through verbal communication. This process is significant in revitalizing the democratic politics (Bimber, 2003; Adams, 2009; Shulman, 2009).

Secondly, social media expand the scope of political participation through creating new channels of political communication, political mobilization, and organization among citizens, politicians, and government officials. Social media simplify the diffusion of information and political messages, commenting on political information, and recruitment for political issues. Thus, social media sites offer a set of opportunities for democratic citizenship and incentives for citizens to partake in unconventional forms of participation, and it generates an environment that enables a range of interactions and activities (Bimber, 2003; Kriesi, 2008; Bimber et al, 2009; Coleman and Blumler, 2009; Jensen and Anduiza, 2012).

Thirdly, social media generates new sources to facilitate participation and motivate citizens to participate by making information more readily available to them. Social media reduce the costs of acquiring political information, which may serve as a positive motivation for offline political participation such as voting or protest (Norris, 2001; Tolbert and Mcneal, 2003; Jensen and Anduiza, 2012).

Contrastingly, some authors question the value of political information via social media accounts in producing political participation. The intention of individuals to search for political information is a crucial factor, as individuals do not always explore political content. Instead they use them for social communication, work, and entertainment. Therefore, using non-political sites does not promote political engagement (Shah et al, 2001; Cantijoch, 2012). Similarly, Albrini (2008) concludes that information alone might be of little use without well-organized civic political

organizations and institutes, which might translate online political activity into actions in the real world (Albirini, 2008). Moreover, the availability of political information alone cannot guarantee citizens' participation in politics, and accordingly, access to political information on social media will not encourage political participation. Seeking political information is limited to those citizens who are already politically interested and active (Norris, 2003; Cantijoch, 2012; Nie and Erbring, 2009).

In democratic states, citizens also benefit from social media in communicating politically to participate in unconventional types of political participation such as protests and demonstrations. Some scholars analysed that political participation in contemporary democratic societies faces some basic challenges such as a lack of confidence in political institutions and elites, and these challenges have led citizens to search for other forms of participation through social media (Norris, 2002; Aelst and Walgrave, 2004; Dalton, 2004; Lusoli and Ward, 2006; Chadwick, 2006; Chadwick, 2007; Segerberg and Bennett, 2011; Fenton and Barassi, 2011; Kwon et al, 2011; Vaccari, 2012; Harlow, 2012; Cantijoch, 2012; Castells, 2012).

This group of authors emphasize on a set of basic themes about the role of social media in mobilizing participation in protests. Firstly, social media enable users to disseminate and frame information on provocative political events, and facilitate the development of political sophistication. This process has several consequences for individuals' behaviour at political protests; for example, social media shape the political perception and knowledge of citizens, and online discussion groups facilitate anonymous participants to argue about specific topics of common interest (Backer and Wehner, 2001; Diani, 2001; Bimber, 2001; Hughes, 2002; Chadwick, 2006; Bimber et

al.; 2009; Ghannam, 2011, Cantijoch, 2012; Welp and Wheatley, 2012; Papacharissi and Oliveira, 2012; Breuera et al, 2014).

Secondly, social media foster transnational links between individuals and like-minded groups: they are powerful conduits for forming new political movements. Social media sites are more likely to unite citizens who share common interests and grievances despite geographical and social barriers. On social media accounts, participants can form groups who have common interests, build up political organizations, and discuss a variety of significant and mutual topics (Vedel, 2003' Lim, 2012).

In spite of social media's ability to lower communication barriers, some authors argue that connecting online is not enough to result in protests. Protesters often embrace social media to advance the protest's reach (Fuchs, 2008; Barakovic, 2011).

Since 2003, the Kurdish political parties, candidates and politicians generally engaged with the online resources to develop communication strategies during election campaign. The prime example of social media usage in election is the 2009 and the 2013 parliamentary elections. In these elections candidates resorted to social media platforms, especially Facebook and YouTube, to establish communication and promote candidates' political brands and campaigns.

IK, as has been argued, is not a fully liberal democracy, and its economic and social circumstances are quite different from liberal democratic states. Thus, for balance, the next section explores the literature on social media in authoritarian states.

2.2 Social Media and Democracy in Authoritarian States

There is not enough literature pertaining to the role of social media in democratizing party politics and elections in authoritarian states. This is due primarily to the absence of political freedom in these contexts (Calderaro, 2014). In these states, authoritarian governments narrow the scope of political freedom and apply strong censorship policies to prevent citizens from accessing unwanted information; security organizations use social media to suppress and curb citizens' online and offline activism (Michaelsen, 2011; Mackinnon, 2012; Wagner and Gainous, 2013).

Authoritarian states have certain characteristics; authoritarian governments are characterized as non-participatory regimes: they do not provide freedom for citizens to participate in political life. In authoritarian states, citizens are outside of the decision-making process and the outcomes of the government's decisions delink the government and the people. Furthermore, the military, a single political party, a ruling family, or individual elites shape the decision-making in authoritarian governments. The mechanisms for transforming power among political actors are unclear or unavailable to citizens, who cannot contribute to power transformation through elections. Additionally, the circulation of information among citizens and communication channels in authoritarian governments is strongly restricted through control and censorship of the mainstream media and other information sources (Casper, 1995; Valenzuela and Valenzuela, 1995; Posusney, 2002, 2004; Lust-Okar, 2005; Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009; Michaelsen, 2011; Grigsby, 2012).

The rise of the Internet and social media has consequence for political freedom and circulation of information. In many authoritarian states, social media provide a new

way of conducting politics for citizens. They have created an environment that enhances ‘bottom-up’ activism, whereby the public is able to shape political developments (McCallum, 2011; Howard and Hussain, 2013). Many studies on authoritarian states have argued that social media enable citizens to communicate politically to organize protests for democratic transformation. In the Arab world, during the Arab Spring uprisings, social media became important tools for activists to mobilize, organize and inspire protesters to take to the street. The key arguments in this literature about social media and protests revolve around two major themes. First, that social media allow political actors to increase the amount of political information and reduce information access costs. In authoritarian states, social movements and individual activists tend to consider social media as an important asset in their arsenal of protest strategies, which enable them to follow different strategies to organize and direct their adherents. Secondly, increasing and spreading political information under authoritarian regimes may lead to changing public opinion and dismantling the chains of censorship, which ultimately may lead to changing the regime. In these circumstances, social media have important roles in fostering transnational links between individuals and like-minded groups (Howard, 2010; Howard et al., 2011; Khondker, 2011; Tufekci and Wilson, 2012; Cantijoch, 2012; Castells, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013; Eaton, 2013; Breuera et al, 2014).

These studies mainly argue that online resources are facilitating democratization. However, it is important to remember that democratization, as the coming section explains, is a long process: It cannot be achieved through a single set of demonstrations or even compelling an autocrat or dictator to resign and leave power. The experiences in

Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen illustrate that democratic designers should be extremely careful of how to establish a democratic system, because, in the post digital media revolution, returning authoritarianism in a different style or insecurity and instability is possible. This appears to be a longer-term problem of the difficulties of establishing and consolidating democracy that precedes the digital age (Backer and Wehner, 2001; Cabras, 2002; Hill and Sen, 2002; Cardoso and Neto, 2004; Carthew, 2010; Howard, 2010; Shirky, 2011; Ghannam, 2011; Rahimi, 2011; Howard et al., 2011; Murphy, 2011; Khondker, 2011; Cantijoch, 2012; Tufekci and Wilson, 2012; Castells, 2012; Papacharissi and Oliveira, 2012; Lim, 2012; Eaton, 2013; El-Nawawy and Khamis, 2013; Howard and Hussain, 2013; Breuera et al, 2014).

Contrary to these studies, other authors concluded that the Internet and social media might not lead to democratic movement at all. In some circumstances, the Internet and social media enable authoritarian regimes to suppress democratic movements: they can build extensive networks to strengthen and tighten their hold of power. Censorship and surveillance are also problematic for digital democratic movements; it may lead citizens to be reluctant to join democratic movements. The authoritarian regimes use the Internet to develop strategies, tactics, and tools to maintain their power, stifle dissent, censor and monitor opponents, and publish propaganda. They can use the Internet to build a large community to support and promote government views and policies and enhance state power over society. It is argued that the idea that the Internet can spread democracy to the most suppressed citizens is unrealistic (Morozov, 2011; Rahimi, 2011; MacKinnon, 2012; Qiang, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013; Larémont, 2014).

Moreover, the Internet may further empower authoritarian regimes by strengthening their rule. MacKinnon (2012) proposed the concept of ‘networked authoritarianism’ for those regimes empowering their rules by the Internet. In the networked authoritarian state, the single ruling party remains in control while a wide range of conversations about the country’s problems occurs on websites and social-networking services. In the networked authoritarian state, there is no guarantee of individual rights and freedoms. Those whom rulers see as threats are jailed, truly competitive, free, and fair elections are not held, and the courts and the legal system are tools of the ruling party (MacKinnon, 2012). Arguably, in newly developing democracies, governments may benefit from the Internet to curb and disrupt democratization process. According to MacKinnon,

Strong governments in weak and new democracies are using second and third generation Internet controls in ways that contribute to erosion of democracy and slippage back toward authoritarianism. This situation is enabled by a weak rule of law, lack of an independent judiciary, weak guarantees of freedom of speech and other human rights protections heavy or untransparant regulation of communication industry, and weak political opposition that is rendered even weaker by cleaver manipulation of media, legal system, and commercial regulatory system (MacKinnon, 2012: 90).

These analyses are also relevant to the case of IK because IK has authoritarian characteristics. IK citizens communicate through social media to organize protests in order to achieve specific political objectives, such as the protest in Slemani in 2011, in which citizens demanded political reforms. There are also protests to improve human rights conditions and lift restrictions on freedom of speech. Citizens have used social media to mobilize others and partake in protests. Additionally, the Kurdish activists and some parliamentarians relied on social media to expose information on corruption, misuses of government resources for personal and political party purposes, documenting human rights abuses, criticizing the KRG officials and political party leaders. This thesis will assess the impact of social media on these political activities.

3 Impact of the Internet and Social Media on Democratization

In non-democratic societies, the quest for democracy, democratization, and the people's aspiration for democracy and freedom is a contested topic for many scholars. With the arrival of the Internet in authoritarian states, hopes for democracy and freedom are revitalized. However, the question of how the Internet and social media influence democratization in a non-democratic context needs to be examined across contexts in order to build theoretical foundations and expand the current level of understanding about the impact of social media on democratic consolidation.

The advent of the Internet encouraged scholars to draw different conclusions about the implications of the Internet and social media for democratic governance. Some envisioned the Internet as a great new era for democratic promotion following the invention of direct and representative democracies (Grossman, 1995), and a new cure

for democratic imperfections in liberal democracies (Chadwick, 2006), while others see it as having limited impact on democratic politics (Margolis and Riaño, 2009; Hindman, 2009).

In order to assess the relationship between social media and democratisation, this thesis operationalizes democratisation in terms of political participation and political communication. The study's justification for this approach stemmed from literature on democratisation, which consider political participation and political communication as two important factors in enhancing democracy in Western countries (Pateman, 1970; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2011; Rawnsley, 2005). According to Pateman, early, 'classical' theorists on democracy, Rousseau, Mill, and Cole, emphasised on maximum participation of all the people in political life. Political participation is a necessary condition for political institutions to function, protection of the stability of political system, and work as possible force in solving many problems in Western democracies (Pateman, 1970). It is unimaginable to have a healthy democratic system without active participation of citizens in politics (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2011). On political communication, according to Rawnsley (2005), one of the reasons behind the public's declining interest in political life, and the weak turnout during parliamentary and presidential elections in Western democracies is the existence of crisis in political communication. He argues that practising politics depends on successful communication strategies that appear in the organization of collective action, and government responses to public opinion (Rawnsley, 2005). Political communication is also important to democratisation because it allows the expression of new ideas, facilitates political recruitment, and improves socialisation and mobilisation; political

communications have social and political consequences for social control and nation building (Rawnsley, 2005). Before engaging with how the Internet and social media influence political participation, political communication, and democratisation, it is useful to define the concepts of political participation and then political communication.

3.1 Political Participation

Political participation is difficult to define due to variations in forms of engagement with politics, the occurrence of the political participation in different arenas or political contexts, and variations in the intensity of participation in terms of time and resources. The term basically refers to wide range of political activities that aim to establish links from the mass public to the ruling elites (Hague and Harrop, 2004; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2011).

Some scholars defined the concept from a western democratic perspective and excluded some other types of political activities e.g. political discussion. According to Huntington and Nelson, political participation is:

Activity by private citizens designed to influence government decision-making (Huntington and Nelson, 1976: 3).

Additionally, Verba et al defined political participation as:

An activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by

influencing the selection of people who make those policies (Verba et al, 1995: 38).

These definitions are not fully valid for non-democratic settings, as citizens have limited influence in the decision-making process (Hague and Harrop, 2004; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2011). In contrast, Uldam and Vestergaard (2015) propose an appropriate definition for the concept: they do not see the concept from the perspective of influencing decision-making. They define political participation as:

An understanding that captures the efforts of civil society actors to address issues of public concern beyond the rights and obligations of liberal citizenship such as voting (Uldam and Vestergaard, 2015: 2).

Scholars debated two main typologies of political participation. The first is labelled as conventional or formal political participation, and refers to voting and political discussion. These types of political participation occur within institutional context. The second is unconventional or informal political participation, for example participation in boycotts, protests, demonstrations, and social movements. These types of participation are conducted outside official institutional settings and aim to resist the dominant politics (Pateman, 1970; Pintor and Morlino, 2003; Hague and Harrop, 2004; Kitschelt and Rehm, 2011; Jorba and Bimber, 2012; Uldam and Vestergaard, 2015). These definitions are relevant to this study, as the thesis examines one type of formal political activity e.g. the 2013 parliamentary election, and one type of informal political participation e.g. the Slemani protest in 2011.

For the purpose of this study, this thesis will combine concepts from democratic theory, namely political participation and political communication, with insights from social media literature. This thesis uses Teorell's (2006) conceptualization and classification of political participation. His conceptualization for the concept covers three angles; the first is political participation as influencing attempts; the second is political participation as direct decision making; and the third is political participation as political discussion (Teorell, 2006). Teorell's model will be further expanded under the shadow of social media literatures. This study focuses on two types of Teorell's classification of political participation: as an influencing attempt, and political participation as political discussion. The study deliberately avoided concentrating on political participation as direct decision-making because there is no empirical example of political participation as direct decision-making in IK. Therefore there will be no empirical chapter in this study on this type of political participation.

3.1.1 Political Participation as an Influencing Attempt

The first dimension highlighted by Teorell (2006) is called political participation as an influencing attempt. Other scholars, such as Sidney Verba and his colleagues, also discussed this type of political participation. They emphasized the citizens' ability to affect government officials (Verba and Nie, 1978). This perspective also considers political participation as an instrumental act organized and conducted by the public to make the government and political system responsive to their will. Verba (1996) argues that:

Participation is a mechanism for representation, a means
by which governing officials are informed of the

preferences and the needs of the public and are induced to respond to those preferences and needs (Verba, 1996: 1).

In his reflection on this idea, Powell asserts that the responsiveness of the political system and government political decisions to the citizens' demands are strongly linked with accountability (Powell, 2003).

From these understandings, the responsiveness of government individuals and institutions to the preferences and needs of citizens is a central normative issue in democratic theories. Teorell (2006) calls it as 'the responsive model of democracy' (Teorell, 2006). Consequently, this perspective bypasses the elitists' model of democracy and participation by granting citizens the space to influence the policy outcomes rather than electing representatives, in which their outcomes may not match voter's preferences and needs.

Typologies of participation that aim to influence political elites are demonstrations, social movements, boycotts, writing petitions, organizing in unions,. These ranges of activities are prime examples of this type of political participation both in democratic and authoritarian contexts (Kitschelt and Rehm, 2011).

For the purpose of this thesis, one type of political participation will be selected, as an example of an influencing attempt: social movements (Kitschelt and Rehm, 2011). The arrival of the Internet and social media left tremendous implications for social movements. Hence, it is possible to distinguish between two lines of arguments; one sees social media platforms as useful resources for social movements, while the other considers them as risks.

The first argument believes that social movements extensively benefited from social media, which mobilized citizens, established communication locally and globally, coordinated collective action, disseminate information, and leadership. Social media make achieving key functions of social movements, such as communication, organization and mobilization, faster and more efficient. They empower social movements to strategize coordination tactics by accelerating users' involvement with the online networks of communities, forming a collective identity, and joining collective action. Additionally, social media facilitates the construction of online communities and increase interaction and collaboration among online members (Bimber and Flanagin, 2005; Wall, 2007; Bennett et al, 2008; Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008; Brundidge and Rice, 2009; Rahimi, 2011; Kwon et al, 2011; Shirky, 2011; Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011; Yahyanejad and Gheytnchi, 2012; Towner, 2012; Jensen and Anduiza, 2012; Colombo et al, 2012; Castells, 2012; Lopes, 2014; Breuera et al, 2014).

Online communities allow for the distribution of success stories among social movements across the globe. Social media permits communities across borders to be aware that they share similar problems because they nurtured transportable strategies for mobilization (Howard and Hussain, 2013). In this sense, Castells (2009) concluded that

Individual citizens around the world are using the new capacity of communication networking to advance their projects, to defend their interests, and to assert their values (Castells, 2009: 57).

Similarly, Norris (2002) argues that,

The Internet has altered citizens' involvement in politics by electronically promoting the diffusion of protest ideas and tactics quickly and efficiently across national borders (Norris, 2002: 208).

Additionally,

Social media were singularly powerful in spreading protest messages driving coverage by mainstream broadcasters, connecting frustrated citizens with one another, and helping them to realize that they could take shared action regarding shared grievances (Howard and Hussain, 2012: 116).

Furthermore, and on a global level, social media have transformed the ways in which civil society actors and activists organize protests and express dissent. Social movement leaders employ social networking sites and digital content systems to orchestrate collective action, activate and fuel local protest networks, establish networks and links with international social movements and share their political opinion and perspectives with global media systems and corporations on micro-level (Bimber et al, 2005; Byrne, 2007; Howard, 2011; Gerbaudo, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013).

Social media have had noticeable impact on leadership issues of social movements. Some authors argue that they operate without clear leaders. Instead, they have been organized by participation of groups, which use an informal style of decision-making. The key tasks are performed by groups of activists that are horizontal in

structure without explicit hierarchies (Tufekci, 2014). The horizontal nature of networks, Castells argues

Supports cooperation and solidarity while undermining the need for formal leadership. The Internet creates the conditions for a form of shared practice that allows a leaderless movement to survive, deliberate, coordinate and expand (Castells, 2012: 229).

Social media allow citizens to form online groups unlimited by geographic boundaries or the need for face-to-face communication (Shirky, 2008). Many key functions traditionally linked with social movement leaders are accomplished by individual actors positioned in social media-facilitated networks e.g. strategic framing of protest activity, connecting fragmented and separate individuals and groups in collective action (Della Porta and Diani, 2006; Gerbaudo, 2012; Poell et al, 2016).

Moreover, in times of protest and demonstration, social media allow citizens to distribute information and news and develop new forms of journalism, known as citizens' journalism. Citizens' journalism facilitates political participation supported by the Internet and social media and it is significant for social movements as well. Citizens can publish photographs and video on social media (Bimber and Flanagin, 2005; Quinn and Lamble, 2008; Kwon et al, 2011). In the digital age, citizens are part of journalism as they have the opportunity to influence the traditional power relations in the media (Woo-Young, 2005). The scope of citizens' journalism is not limited to sharing images and photos taken by citizens, but via social media citizen journalism, users interact, publish news in their online accounts. Such news and information is open to feedback,

responses, sharing of opinions, experiences, and feelings of a larger group of users and provoke discussion and interaction. On the micro-level, citizens' journalism allows citizen to be real-time observers of events (Quinn and Lambie, 2008; Kwon et al, 2011; Tufekci, 2014; Demirhan, 2014).

Social media have also created implications for the need of social movements for the mainstream media in gaining publicity and attention to their case. Media coverage is crucial to generate public sympathy and communicate with the internal and external environment (Lopes, 2014; Donk et al, 2004). In a setting where the media are strongly censored and controlled by regime apparatus or the mainstream media are neglecting coverage of activities of social movements, the Internet and social media can play active role in providing alternative media coverage. In this sense, social media impact the spread of information and reporting news on social movements (Demirhan, 2014). Therefore, social media are key to social movements to reach out to the outside environment and publish their pictures because social media and the Internet undermine the vertical structure of control and provide new outlets for the free expression of opinions and views (Zayani, 2014).

Social media not only break the state's control over the flow of information, but also allows the spread of information between different countries faster than traditional media outlets (Howard and Hussain, 2013). Social media provide "means by which many people can reach information that governments would rather deny them" (Tufekci, 2014: 2).

One of the crucial features of social media is their ability to bypass official sources and mass media, granting a voice to ordinary citizens in transforming the

political landscape of their society. Social media can offer alternative perspectives toward social issues and act as prime information providers in a contentious political arena (Kwon et al, 2011; Clark, 2012; Lopes, 2014; Demirhan, 2014). Additionally, social media influence the information infrastructure of societies. Information infrastructure

Become formative spaces for nurturing and organizing social action. Such spaces are especially important for the public sphere in non-democratic societies because they can be the only public spaces where autonomous or even anonymous discussion can take place (Howard and Hussain, 2013: 35).

In the digital environment, social media grant ordinary citizens the opportunity to have access to other sources of information uncontrolled by the state-run media. The international news corporations and networks of friends and other online connected users provide these sources. These sources can sharply undermine the control of state over the flow and circulation of information across networks (Howard and Hussain, 2013). Therefore, information technologies empower both individuals and social movements, enabling them to break barriers and constraints imposed by governments. Citizens' contribution may influence the dominant political discourse, challenging, and weakening the control of authoritarian governments over the political discourse and narratives (Dahlberg, 2001; Sieb, 2008; Salamey and Pearson, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013). This thesis explores all of the above claims with regards to social media and social movements and assess the role of social media in facilitating the influencing

attempts of social movements in the case of Iraqi Kurdistan, by focusing on the case of the Slemani protests of 2011.

With respect to assessing the success of social media platforms in facilitating the attempts of social movements to influence decision-makers, it is also necessary to consider that authoritarian regimes can use the same tools to curb and suppress citizens' political participation with censorship and surveillance, disinformation, and crackdowns on social movements. In this sense, the Internet can be a significant tool for social control. These regimes may resort to disconnecting their entire country from the Internet or blocking specific social networking websites e.g. Facebook and YouTube, to prevent citizens from receiving critical information, which could undermine the regimes' legitimacy and stability. When a government practices censorship, the ability of citizens to communicate politically becomes weak and probably results in suppression of political activities (Aday et al, 2010; Morozov, 2011; Howard, 2011; Morozov, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013; Tufekci, 2014).

Furthermore, social media can alert security forces to social movements and protesters' strategies and plans. In Iran, security forces relied on social networking sites to prevent organizing mass demonstrations by ex-protesters of the Green movements, which were sparked by the 2009 Iranian presidential elections. Through social media, the security apparatus succeeded in targeting activists and their coordination plans and strategies. Even members of the Green movement did not expect that their movement could be suppressed by the technologies on which they extensively depended (Yahyanejad and Gheytnchi, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012). Authoritarian regimes invested heavily in developing digital counterinsurgency strategies to crackdown on protests and

dissent. The digital counterinsurgency strategies are the combination of several digital methods and sophisticated tactics by some authoritarian regimes to construct virtual firewalls, filters, censorship, removing content, and even demonizing digital movements and the influence of social media networks, (Qiang, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013; Tufekci, 2014).

Because of that, social media can be harmful for social movements in terms of coordination of actions. Due to the lack of centrality of command in social media networks, different information about coordination strategies flows from different social media accounts, and ultimately confuse participants. Tufekci (2014) observed this risk in the Egyptian revolution in 2011 and concluded that

although social media were used as a key tool for requesting supplies, it often only added to the confusion, as people who had not known whether an order had been filled would repeat prior days' requests. By itself, social media does not automatically facilitate easier organizing of logistics, and can lead to confusion (Tufekci, 2014: 11).

The same risk has been observed in the 2009 Green Movement in Iran and the 2013 Gezi Park Movement in Turkey (Yahyanejad and Gheytaichi, 2012; Demirhan, 2014). Therefore, social media can fragment protesters into smaller groups which makes it easier for security forces to suppress them (Tufekci, 2014).

The above discussion of the relationship between social media, social movements and political participation as influencing attempt suggest that social media platforms can be useful for to facilitate political participation in social movements

aimed at achieving democratization. Yet, social media might also be used as a weapon by nondemocratic regimes to suppress these movements and hamper democratic transformation.

3.1.2 Political Participation as Political Discussion

Another dimension of political participation classified by Teorell (2006) is articulating political participation as political discussion. Scholars have disagreed over what should be dubbed a political discussion, and how it should be conducted individually or collectively. In regard to this, some see political discussion as decision-making by means of argument (Elster, 1998); other scholars consider political discussion as a process of public opinion formation, which comes before decision-making (Chambers, 1996; Teorell, 2006).

Political discussion is the essential need for democracy to work and do its functions (Gimmler, 2001; Coleman and Blumler, 2009). According to Barber, ‘there can be no strong democratic legitimacy without ongoing talk’ (Barber, 1984: 136). Additionally, Insua and French (2010) defined democratic political discussion as

The entire series of interactions between authorities, stakeholders, and citizens from the initial exploration of issues of concern, up to the conclusion of deliberations and resolution of the matter, through to the making and implementation of the decision (Insua and French, 2010: 3).

One of the leading scholars who argued extensively for the idea of public and political discussion is German theorist and scholar Jurgen Habermas. He highlighted the importance of the ‘public sphere’, which he defined as “a virtual or imaginary community, which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space” (Habermas, 1962:175). Similarly, Hauser (1999) defined public sphere as “a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them” (Hauser, 1999:61). The concept refers to an area in social life where citizens can together discuss and identify common problems without restrictions; it allows them to debate and influence political action. This discussion takes place mostly through mass media, meetings, and social media.

With the arrival of the Internet and social media platforms, the status of political discussion has transformed tremendously. The online platforms revolutionized human communication and provided humanity with resources to establish conversation, interpersonal networking, personalization and individualism (Löfgren and Smith, 2003; Gunther and Diamond, 2003; Abrams, 2005; Semetko, 2006; Kalnes, 2009; Calderaro, 2014; Lachapelle and Maarek, 2015).

Scholars have proposed two prospects about how the Internet and social media influence political discussion. The first suggests that the Internet and social media are good tools for generating political discussion and promoting democratization, while the second argues that the online tools do not bring innovations for political discussion and democratic politics.

The first perspective believes that one of the merits of social media is the possibility of establishing two-way communication and generating interaction between senders and receivers of the online contents. Bruns and Highfield highlight that

The growing adaptation of social media has the potential to increase interactions between citizens and politicians, raising the level of participation in public debate, by putting these different voices in the same space (Bruns and Highfield, 2013: 671).

Groups of authors consider the Internet to be positive for generating discussion and improving democratic consolidation. In their view, it is likely that the Internet and social media will lead to more informal political discussion, as it provides access to information from diversified sources and to new channels of communication. The Internet and social media have transformed the status of the availability and access to information and data, which is necessary for generating political discussion and democratic deliberation. In this way, it is logical to see the online platforms as a positive force for democratization, particularly in those contexts where the media outlets are dominated by political ruling elites. Access to online information will make citizens more politically active and more informed about government and politics. Thus, the Internet is a significant tool to serve democratic ideals because it is neutral, decentralized, interactive, educational, and can reinvigorate the public sphere. Free-flowing political information is essential for the democratic participation of citizens because information helps citizens to select the correct representation, monitor the current government officials, and therefore facilitate the enactment of desirable policies

(O'Loughlin, 2001; Mäkinen and Kuira, 2008; Best and Wade, 2009; Groshek, 2009; Tewksbury and Rittenberg, 2012; Salgado, 2014).

Similarly, Gimmmler (2001) argued that,

In the deliberative process, information plays a central role along with achieving equality of access to it. Equality of access to information and an unrestricted means of access are fundamental to a more ambitious practice of discourse. This is supported by Internet technology. The opportunity for interaction, which the Internet facilitates, satisfies another prerequisite of deliberative practice. As a means of promoting interaction, the Internet has a positive and direct contribution to make. Above all, the Internet encourages the exchange of services and information (Gimmmler, 2001: 32).

Through social media, citizens have the opportunity to employ the interactive features of social media accounts, pages, and websites. Political party websites and social networking platforms are grant the public freedom of contribution and of sharing the parties' online message across individual networks when visiting their platforms (Ward et al, 2003; March, 2004; Jackson and Lilleker, 2009).

Scholars argue that the Internet and social media provide a platform for open and free expression and a medium for informing citizens about politics. The public obtains opportunities to express political views and learn about those of others. Social media provide opportunities for citizens to openly discuss politics, criticize, scrutinize,

and even steer cynicism regarding the government and the established media (Dutton, 2009; Michaelsen, 2011; Howard et al, 2011; Towner, 2012; Castells, 2012; Towner, 2012; Tufekci and Wilson, 2012; Salgado, 2014).

Social media offer a pluralistic environment for political discussion and social media sites support free communication (Howard and Hussain, 2013). Social media are considered a new discursive space, which could lead to more participation in the public debate for all citizens. Consequently, it is possible for social media to establish a deliberative atmosphere for the development of civil society and pluralism (Dahlberg, 2001; Gimmmler, 2001; Macintosh, 2004; Zheng and Wu, 2005; Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007).

Similarly, Coleman and Blumber (2009) state that interactive, digital information and communication technologies would seem to offer promising ways of creating forms of political discourse consistent with democratic norms. Online interactivity could facilitate communication connection characterized by greater transparency and public co-presence, political discussion and individual self-representation (Coleman and Blumber, 2009).

The Internet may also empower individuals to influence politics and participate in discussion about topics of common interest. According to Noveck (2000)

Individuals could have a newfound influence on political and other decision-making processes on all level. Discussion of issues of central importance to geographic communities and dispersed interest communities can form a basis for consensus-building and political organizing.

The ready availability of information to inform the conversation disperses power from the educated elites to all participants (Noveck, 2000: 21).

The Internet and social media are also bringing new and less well-represented voices into political process (Chadwick, 2006).

Additionally, the Internet and social media have changed the ways in which politics can be conducted across societies. According to West (2011), politics no longer has to be an echo chamber where people of like-mindedness listen to one another; digital technology enriches political conversation and engagement. People are exposed to more views than in the past. This enriches national dialogues and allows people to evaluate policy ideas (West, 2011).

Another group of scholars argue that the Internet and social media are more likely to reinforce the current status of politics. Instead of rejuvenation of democratic politics, the Internet may contribute to damaging democracy by lowering the levels of rational public sphere by forcing online political arguments to be simple, distorted, and intensely impolite in order to gain popularity among other countless online arguments (Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Sunstein, 2001; Noam, 2005).

On the other hand, the Internet can be seen as something that

Threatens to overwhelm us with so much information so as to give the appearance of democratizing and enriching our political lives while actually frowning us in irrelevancies (Noveck, 2000: 23).

She further argues that information on the Internet has little educational impact regarding political context (Noveck, 2000).

Additionally, Kalnes (2009) questioned the Internet and social media platforms' ability to establish political discussion between citizens and political parties and enhance democratic politics. Parties' motivations in adopting social media are primarily driven by their attempt to win elections rather than proposing policy choices for citizens to give their opinion and rationally discuss these options (Kalnes, 2009).

Moreover, Noveck (2000) observes:

Despite the flourishing of electronic commerce and the doubling of the webs size every week, there is no concomitant growth in electronic democracy. There is much information, but no guarantee of knowledge; a lot of chat but little debate. Seeming transparency and openness lead to a loss of privacy, rather than the emergence of a virtual public sphere (Noveck, 2000: 20).

Additionally, not all citizens have the intention and skills to be active online participants due to not possessing sufficient political knowledge to engage in online discussion. Having access to unlimited amount of online information may not lead to active and effective participation of citizens in discussing and proposing policy choices, as most people still have no sufficient knowledge, skills, and even interest to engage with discussing complex questions of their government. Instead, party leaders and representatives are mostly doing that for citizens (Margolis and Riaño, 2009). Additionally, others reveal that obtaining news and information from social media will

not lead to increasing users' knowledge about politics or shaping citizens' political action. It is also difficult to present a mechanism to measure levels of increasing political knowledge through social media platforms (Pasek and Romer, 2009; Baumgartner and Morris, 2010; Groshek and Dimitrova, 2011).

There are some problems of democracy that the Internet and social media seem to be unable to solve, or maybe the Internet will create other problems for democracy. According to O'Loughlin, there are some practical difficulties the Internet is ineffective in solving, such as the problem of access, the sheer volume of discussants which makes it difficult to reach a consensus, and moderators editing comments: this may increase the debate's rationality, but it takes power away from participants. As long as the Internet is not under the control of citizens and democratic governments, then public sphere and deliberation process cannot operate democratically (O'Loughlin, 2001).

Furthermore, Hindman (2008) believes that social media will not expand political discourse and it is still tools that political elites or elite groups can use them to enhance their political influence and manipulate citizens. Even the contents produced by citizens stemmed frequently from the same contents created by the political and business elite-dominated media sources. The Internet has not made debate more inclusive and the online tools contribute towards reproducing the hierarchies of mainstream media and politics. Furthermore, participants in the online political discussion are elite participants from mainstream media rather than marginalized and excluded participants from traditional media. It is not difficult to discuss in online space, but it is not easy to be heard (Hindman, 2009). Besides that, in terms of information production, political parties' adoption of the Internet

Generates opportunities for monitoring maverick individuals and groups within the party. It also presents the possibility of a new information elite emerging within the membership, whereby certain key players have greater information and better opportunities to be heard (Gibson and Ward, 2009: 89).

Similarly, Moore (1999) observed that

Interesting and powerful ideas are discussed online infinitely broader than what occurs in mass-media 'public discourse'—but to a large extent such ideas seem buried in the net itself, and when the computer is turned off one wonders if it was not all just a dream, confined to the ether. So far, there seems to be minimal spill over into the real world (Moore, 1999: 41).

More importantly, one of the common problems in the new democracies is the dominance of powerful political and economic actors of the media outlets over social media platforms, which generally leads to a lack of pluralism in the public sphere, as this dominance is less likely to permit diversity of opinion and may even manipulate public opinion. Therefore, it is more likely that this dominance will be transported to the online media and creates obstacles for a free media environment supportive of participation. Consequently, the invasion of online media spaces and controlling digital contents by the dominant elites contrast deeply with the notion of the Internet and social

media as a tool of liberalization and pluralism in developing democracies (Salgado, 2014).

In summary, there are two fundamental perspectives about the implication of the Internet and social media for political discussion. One believes that the Internet and social media are contributing to enhance political discussion and democratization. The other maintains that the Internet and social media have little impact on developing a democratic political discussion. This thesis will consider these perspectives in relation to the social media and Internet sites of political parties in IK. These perspectives can be used to assess contribution of websites of political parties, Facebook accounts and pages of party leaders and politicians, and pro-party pages and accounts in generating political discussion in chapter five.

3.2 Political Communication

Despite the academic study of political communication being a fairly new discipline, the actual practice of the phenomenon is as old as politics. Authors who have engaged with the concept initially realized that the concept is difficult to define with any precision, simply because both components of the phrase are themselves open to a variety of definitions. Traditional views about political communication would have been that it is a linear, top-down process from leaders to people (Lilleker, 2006).

Other authors mainly connect the aim of political communication with the ambitions of political actors to achieve set of political objectives. In regard to this, Lilleker (2006) claims that the purpose of political communication is to achieve a

political objective. He argues that the modern understanding of the concept concentrates on three actors, each of whom produce political communication:

First, the political sphere itself: the state and its attendant political actors. Their role is to communicate their actions to society in order to gain legitimacy among and compliance from the people. Second, there are the non-state actors, where we would include a range of organizations with political motivations as well as corporate bodies and, of course, the voters. Each of these organizations and groups communicate messages into the political sphere, in the hope of having some level of influence. Third, there are the media outlets, the media communicates about politics, influencing the public as well as the political spheres (Lilleker, 2006: 1).

This perspective clearly identifies the actors that communicate with society in order to achieve particular objectives. These definitions mainly concentrate on top-down communication by politicians and party leaders, and do not consider citizens' communication with politicians.

This study considers definitions proposed by McNair (2011) and Perloff (2014) because these two scholars define the concept more broadly in terms of actors who engage with the activity and the issue addressed. McNair (2011) emphasizes attempts by politicians to reach political aims. He provides an appropriate understanding of the concept, defining political communication as:

1) all forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives. 2) Communication addressed to those actors by non-politicians such as voters and newspaper columnists. 3) Communication about these actors and their activities as contained in news reports, editorials, and other forms of media discussion of politics (McNair, 2011: 4).

Furthermore, Perloff (2014) consider political communication to be

The process by which language and symbols employed by leaders, media, or citizens, exert intended or unintended effects on the political cognition, attitudes, or behaviours of individuals or on outcomes that bear on the public policy of a nation, state, or community (Perloff, 2014: 30).

Technological developments have significant consequences for political communication especially during elections and campaigning. The rise of the Internet and social media left unprecedented implications for elections and campaigns. Different terminologies, such as online campaigns, digital politics, e-democracy, and Facebook or Twitter election have emerged in the public discourse (Bimber and Davis, 2003; Davis et al, 2009; Towner, 2012; Williams and Gulati, 2012; Edgerly et al, 2013). As the Internet and social media integrated with the elections and campaigns, scholars of democracy and democratization began to examine the implications of these technologies for further enhancing elections and campaigns. Hence, the results of their studies

illustrated two opposite expectations. The first argues that the Internet and social media have many positives for elections. While the second view believes that the online platforms do not have powerful influence in democratising elections and campaigning.

The first perspective considers that the Internet and social media have many benefits for candidates and citizens. For candidates, the online resources increased candidates' capacities in publishing information on party activities or politicians' activities, communicating political messages, promoting their personality and political images, issuing statements, raising funds, and mobilizing voters to go to voting booths. Politicians find social media to be a quick, effective, and powerful conduit to energize their supporters through posting regular contents online. This is more likely to motivate people to engage politically and support candidates more actively (Tewksbury, 2003; Bimber and Davis, 2003; Davis, 2009; Davis et al, 2009; Dhuddi, 2010; Edgerly et al, 2013; Bruns and Highfield, 2013; Gainous and Wagner, 2014; Barberá, 2014; Suiter, 2015; Highfield, 2016; Towner, 2012).

Social media are also effective in empowering individual candidates to organize and strategize independent campaigns. This is because they allow

Candidates to develop decentralized campaign strategies, because this type of technology is a reasonably cheap and functional platform for campaigning that strengthens individual candidates and their campaigns at local and national levels (Carlson and Strandberg, 2012: 126).

Online campaigns, especially on social media, provide new capacities for candidates to create personalized and individualized campaigns, more or less separated

from the party's campaigning. Generally, social media brings concentration on the individual candidates and politicians rather than the political parties. Therefore, it provides fertile ground for increased personal campaign (Vergeer, 2012; Enli and Skogerbø, 2013; Suiter, 2015).

Moreover, social media allow candidates to present themselves as multidimensional figures, share their personal and private life with the public, thus, competing for attention with other candidates. They can also use it to organize personal meetings with journalists and voters. Traditional campaigning is needed for personal contact and communication with voters, and social media seem to be a vital aid to this (Lilleker and Jackson, 2010).

Additionally, social media usage in election campaigning resulted in new practices called by some scholars 'micro targeting', i.e. targeting specific groups. According to Edgerly et al,

Campaigns can now target certain voters with specific information. By doing this, campaigns have a better chance of appealing to the specific issues that are most important to different voters (Edgerly et al, 2013: 85).

With the rise of social media, the role of mainstream media in elections and campaigns has changed considerably. The Internet and social media enable candidates and politicians to bypass the mainstream media and communicate directly with voters and control their political message (Vergeer, 2012; Bode and Dalrymple, 2015). Some politicians and candidates regularly distribute contents to online followers who may rebroadcast it on different networks, increasing the potential reach of each post

substantially. Additionally, the distribution is systematic and denotes a new type of media network. It is a network of largely like-minded users that is easily accessible and operates separately from the gatekeeping function of the traditional media (Gainous and Wagner, 2014).

Social media enhance the capacity of politicians to influence agenda setting of mainstream media, attract the media coverage for their campaign, and enhance visibility. This is also important in countries such as IK, where the mainstream media are dominated by two major parties. It is particularly important for unknown candidates or minor political parties because the online platforms offer them the ability to transmit campaign messages, compensate underfunded candidates and increase the capacity of candidates and minor parties to compete and vie with other powerful candidates. In some contexts, candidates integrated their mainstream media campaign activities with social media to attract more viewers and audiences. Even mainstream media streamed their primetime coverage to multiple platforms during the election period (Gueorguieva, 2008; Borah, 2014; Singer, 2014; Highfield, 2016). The importance of social media linked with the idea that

The networks exist outside the traditional media machine,
allowing candidates to shape and dictate their content
(Gainous and Wagner, 2014: 1).

The networks are appropriate at election time when mainstream media concentrate on large parties and party leaders (Bruns, 2008; Shirky, 2008; Hermans and Vergeer, 2012; D'heer and Verdegem, 2014).

Furthermore, social media effectively connects candidates with very remote users in online communities. This is particularly interesting because they allow candidates to converge their campaigns with different networks, irrespective of distance, geography, and traditional political cleavage. These properties are significant for online campaign because they may facilitate many of the campaigning goals, from and network of supporters and volunteers, and save resources and capacities for candidates when they want to organize campaigns on the ground (Bayraktutan, 2014; Gainous and Wagner, 2014).

For citizens, social media platforms have many benefits for engagement with the election campaigns. Online resources assist the online users to learn about candidates and familiarize themselves with candidates' pages, and allow supporters to be part of the candidates' campaign (Williams and Gulati, 2012; Edgerly et al, 2013). Social media tools provide users with the opportunity to increase communication, participation, rely on users' generated content, and harness collective knowledge (Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008).

It is unquestionable that social media extensively lowers the costs of publishing and distributing for citizen and user-generated contents. During campaigns, citizens can publish a variety of content on the election and candidates including videos, comments and blogs. Social media are effective tools in enhancing open and free expression, and foster exchange feedback. Additionally, social media create forums for citizens to publicly and openly criticise public officials, politicians, and candidates and practice the role of gatekeeping. These tools offer readily available public forums, which are

considered a central element in democratic consolidation (Barlow, 2007; Shirky, 2008; Gainous and Wagner, 2014).

Furthermore, social media also enable citizens to organize and collaborate to effectively distribute messages to supporters and encourage the media to back campaigns (Ragas and Kioussis, 2011). Social media allow

Users to not only choose what network to be part of but also to be an active participant in the network. The user is a new creator, not simply a receptacle. This ground-shifting advance creates an entirely new way to view politics and the values attributed to advertising and campaigning (Gainous and Wagner, 2014: 5).

The rise of social media and its integration with campaign strategies altered expectations about the capability of social media in establishing interactivity and genuine political discussion among voters and candidates. Some scholars even expected that social media practices might reduce gaps between politicians and citizens, encouraging a type of representation based on interactive communication. Practices across contexts suggest that social media enable voters to communicate directly with candidates and campaign staff (Vergeer, 2012; Edgerly et al, 2013; Gainous and Wagner, 2014).

Some scholars see social media interactivity as a way to enhance direct representation, because direct representation requires two-way communication between politicians and citizens. The communication should cover every day political conversations between representatives and the public. Some scholars argue for

‘sustained engagement’, which means that the goal of campaign should not only be mobilizing voters, securing votes, and win election. The candidates and campaigners should sustain a level of engagement with voters and supporters for a longer period. Sustained engagement also encourages granting opportunities for people to be part of the campaign by letting them set the tone, and sustain a connection over time (Carlson and Strandberg, 2012; Edgerly et al, 2013; Graham et al, 2013).

With respect to the second perspective, which argues that social media are not going to produce any new changes towards democratising election campaign. Some scholars argue that social media further empower large parties and candidates over minor parties and candidates. Large parties and candidates have better financial resources and as a result they can benefit in linking mainstream media campaign with the online domain. Furthermore, large parties and candidates have recruited staff with technological talents who may design social media strategies more effective than small parties and candidates. Therefore, social media increase political inequalities among political parties and candidates (Davis, 1999; Morris, 1999; Chadwick, 2006; Jacobs and Spierings, 2016).

Despite this, many candidates continue to use social media for information and news sharing in a top-down fashion as a strategy for delivering information. Towner (2012) highlighted several reasons for this:

First, it is costly in time and money to maintain social media sources. Second, two-way communication forces candidates to clarify ambiguous policy positions, which may weaken a candidates’ broad appeal. Third, candidates

fear losing control over their message and image, as social media open the door to unfiltered, user-generated content. Fourth, candidates simply may not know how to use social media for two-way communication (Towner, 2012: 193).

From this perspective, candidates may not fully use the potential of social media interactivity properties to establish democratic dialogue and interactivity over social media platforms (Galley, 2000; Bimber and Davis, 2003; Glassman et al, 2010; Grant et al, 2010; Graham et al, 2013; Bayraktutan et al, 2014).

Moreover, all citizens do not have equal access to the Internet or interest in politics. There are countless users who solely use social media for non-political purposes. Social media campaigns will not reach those citizens cut off by the digital divide (Browning, 2002; Vergeer, 2012).

Additionally, social media news may be subject to information bias and manipulation. Users may exclude information that does not meet their expectations and preferences. They can select information that supports their political perspectives and beliefs and practice self-selection process to avoid exposure to unwanted and inconsistent information. In this case, citizens may not follow diverse range of political topics and this may lead to a lack of the common experience necessary to a well-functioning democracy (Bimber and Davis, 2003; Iyengar et al, 2008).

4 Methodology

The purpose of this section is to explain the plan, activities and procedures that this thesis followed in order to find the answer to the research questions. This section

also attempt to illustrate the operationalization of theoretical framework for assessing the implication using social media platforms for democratization process in IK in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

4.1 The Epistemological and Methodological Paradigm

This thesis took an interpretive approach, using an epistemological method to describe, understand, and observe how social media influences the democratisation process in IK. Interpretivism is a term that usually denotes an alternative to the positivist approach that dominated social sciences for a long time. This approach aims to understand events and uncover the meanings relevant to human behaviours and the external world. It also explores the motivations behind human behaviours. It does not aim to discover laws about causal relationships between variables; rather, it aims to understand human nature, and societal and cultural diversity (Della Porta & Keating, 2008). This approach opposes the positivist approach: it aims to understand social outcomes but without impact from universal laws or rules. Explanations are instead drawn from the interpretation of human motives for behaviours and actions. Interpretivism tends to explain action by demonstrating it as something justified from an agent's perspective (Ferejohn, 2004; Della Porta & Keating, 2008). The interpretivist approach is founded on the idea that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural science and therefore requires 'social scientists to grasp the subjective meaning of social action' (Bryman, 2016:26).

The interpretivist approach requires researchers to interpret elements of the study, thus integrating human interest into the results. Myers (2009) believes that

interpretive researchers assume that access to reality, given or socially constructed, is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments (Myres, 2009). More precisely, interpretivists believe that it is important that they analyse how humans interpret activities; this can be achieved through methods other than those employed by the positivist approach. Individuals are intricate and complex: different people experience and understand the same 'objective reality' in very different ways and have their own, often very different, reasons for acting in the world (Fitzpatrick, 2012; Denscombe, 2014). Interpretivists argue that, in order to understand human action, we need to see the world through the eyes of the actors doing the acting. An interpretivist approach to social research would be much more qualitative, using methods such as unstructured interviews or participant observation (Weber, 2004; Myres, 2009; Fitzpatrick, 2012).

Additionally, there is strong link between qualitative research and using this approach. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003)

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world.

This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, and phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:3).

This study did not consider positivist research as an epistemological paradigm. This is because positivism primarily singles out causal explanation to establish a cause-effect relationship between variables of study. This approach tends to explore universal laws of human behaviour and make generalisations from specific observations in a large number of cases. Positivists are more popular in scientific studies, which generates and tests hypotheses (Héritier, 2008).

However, in social sciences, it is extremely difficult to use instruments and measurement to conduct experiments and use a large dataset and statistical analysis to discover and isolate causes and effects of variables (Della Porta & Keating, 2008). Interpretivism is linked to the study of democratisation as the thesis defines democratisation as a multifactor process; therefore it is difficult to isolate the effects of social media from other factors that may influence democratisation. This study aims to understand how the use of social media influences the Kurdish democratisation process. It aims to understand the effect from the participants' assessment of their motivations for using social media.

This epistemological and methodological approach was influenced during the process of formulating the nature of the research questions of the study and methods applied in collecting data (semi-structured interviews). The nature of the research

questions meant that the questions were formulated in order to understand and reflect on the impact of using social media on the democratisation process from the participants' perspectives. The questions do not aim to establish causal links between social media and democratisation, or gauge the precise influence of social networking sites on democratisation. The study's justification in avoiding this is principally linked with the methodological challenges of measuring the influence of social media. The questions focus on how individuals describe the impact of social media on democratisation from their own experience.

Interpretivism is compatible with the design of the research. The study uses case studies and selected three major events in IK as units of analysis. The study aimed to understand individual perspectives on using social media in these three cases. The interpretivism approach is more appropriate than positivism in understanding events and motivations of human behaviour in these events.

To collect data, this study used semi-structured interviews. Despite its limitations, the interview is generally appropriate for understanding individuals' experiences regarding specific social and political phenomena (Friesen, 2010). Therefore, the study's epistemological and methodological approach is compatible with the methods of data collection adopted to answer the study's questions. The implications of this approach will provide an in-depth descriptive analysis about the impact of using social media platforms for democratisation process in relation to the cases selected. The approach will allow an in-depth understanding of using social media platforms for each event selected in the research design to be obtained.

4.2 The Research Design

To investigate and explore the research questions, this thesis used a case study approach. A case study approach emphasizes detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships (Kumar, 2011). By using a case study approach, this thesis presents an in-depth descriptive analysis of social media's impact on IK's democratization.

In doing so, three case studies were examined. The first case looked at the implication of using social media for mobilization of citizens to participate in protests and its impact for democratic consolidation. To explore this issue, the study concentrated on the Slemani movement in 2011, known as the 17th of February protests. This protest was significant in IK's history because it was the biggest protest against the KRG since the 1991 uprisings. This protest coincided with the Arab Spring revolutions in Tunisia in 2010 and in Egypt in 2011 and lasted for two months. This protest is considered to be the first popular mobilization in IK that demanded real democracy, social, political, and economic reforms. The protesters used social media to communicate with and mobilize other citizens to join them. The government used force to suppress it and ultimately many people were killed and wounded.

In analysing this case, this thesis tends to operationalize theoretical insights addressed under the title 'participation as influencing attempt' to assess the implications of social media usage for the success of the Slemani movement. This case focused on how social media were used for citizen's participation in the movement, how social media influenced the structure of information during the protest, and how the popular movement framed itself in social media platforms and how it challenged political and

media discourse controlled by political parties media. It questions the role social media played in organizing the protest without reliance on traditional political organization especially political parties, and how protesters benefitted from social media for self-organization. The negative impacts on social media on the protesters and their activities and how social media negatively influenced the protest are also examined. Finally, it questions the implications of this digitally fuelled movement on democratic consolidation in IK.

The second case assesses social media in relation to political participation as political discussion by exploring the interactivity between, on the one hand, the Kurdish political parties, including party leaders, parliamentary representatives and government officials, and, on the other hand, Kurdish citizens. More precisely, this case concentrated on two political parties in IK: the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU). The study's justification in selection of these two cases is that they are most different. The PUK is not an institutionalized party, but rather is organized around the personality of the party leader. Moreover, it has great influence over government institutions, as it is closely intertwined with government institutions for historical reasons. As for the KIU, it is, to a large degree, an institutionalized party. Power is not concentrated in one person and it is hard for a single leader of the party to dominate on the party entirely. Among all political parties, the KIU is the first Kurdish and Islamic party that changed its top leaders, including the general secretary through democratic and peaceful means in the party congress. Moreover, the KIU is not intertwined with government institutions. Most parliamentarians and government officials are also high members or leaders of political parties. Hence, the case assesses

the role of social media in generating democratic political discussion and interactivity between political parties and citizens.

This case operationalizes theoretical underpinnings presented under the title ‘political participation as political discussion’ to assess the impact of the Internet and social media for political discussion. This case engaged with an explanation of how social media influenced political discussion between citizens and political parties and how the party websites and social media accounts and pages of the party leaders and pro-party pages and accounts contribute to generating political discussion. It also asks how party leaders use social media and how they have influenced their political position. It further investigates how political parties and their leaders engage with social media for interactivity and dissemination of information and how these issues influence IK’s democratization process.

The third case assesses the use of social media in political campaigning and elections in the Kurdistan parliamentary elections in 2013. The case of the Kurdistan parliamentary elections in 2013 operationalizes theoretical insights presented under title ‘political communication’ to assess the potential of the Internet and social media for democratization. This case focused on how social media influenced electioneering and campaigning strategies by conveying political messages, and mobilizing voters to go to voting booths. It questions how social media influences candidates’ relations with political parties and citizens and how social media influenced the traditional style of campaigning and electioneering. It also investigates the impacts of social media on candidate-mainstream media relations and coverage of campaigning was, and how social media influenced dissemination of information and interactivity between

candidates and citizens. Lastly, it evaluates the negatives of social media on the election campaign and how social media influenced the candidates and their campaigning strategies.

The study chose the Slemani movement in 2011 and the 2013 parliamentary election in IK as case studies. When this study commenced, both cases had already taken place, which prevented direct observation of social media operations in both contexts. However, the researcher interviewed figures that lived and were directly involved with the course of both events including political activists who were leaders of the Slemani movement, and parliamentarians who gained parliamentary seats and organized online campaigns. Thus, the researcher was able to gain their experiences of the events and role of social media.

4.3 Methods of Data Collection

This thesis used qualitative methods to collect data and information. The data was collected mainly through interviews and online contents. Other minor resources, including civil society organization reports (local and international), intergovernmental organization reports and publications such as those by the UN, websites, government documents, magazines and newspapers published in IK, and documents from the political parties were also considered. Usually the interview technique is used for qualitative studies to record human experiences and stories relating to a specific subject through verbal interchange, often face-to-face. Through interviews, the interviewer attempted to elicit information on experience, beliefs or opinions from the interviewees.

For this research, 28 interviews were arranged; the interviews were conducted in the Kurdish language and then the text was translated into English.

For the first case study, the Slemani movement in 2011, ten interviews were conducted with the main and prominent leaders of the protest movement and journalists who covered the protest in Slemani governorate. During the interview, questions were asked about the interviewees experiences and observations of the influence of social media on the protest activities, publicizing information, publishing stories, sending out political message of protesters, organizing protest activities, coordinating collective action, mobilizing undecided citizens to join the protest, resisting government censorship and surveillance, and negative influences of social media on the protest. Additionally, data was collected from Facebook and YouTube contents relevant to the protest.

For the second case study, nine interviews were conducted with party leaders in both parties, specifically those active on social media. The interview questions asked how party leaders engaged with social media to establish political discussion and interactivity; how and why they used social media to disseminate information and communicate politically with citizens, and what the implications were for democratization. Further questions asked how social media enhanced the party's relations with citizens and how party leaders and citizens interacted online social media and how this reflected on the democratization process. Lastly, it they were asked to reflect on the negative impacts of social media on political discussion and interactivity between political parties and democratization, and consequently the democratization process in IK. Besides the interviews, data was also collected from the official websites

of both political parties, official Facebook pages and accounts of leaders of both parties, and pro-party social media accounts and pages. Additionally, the study observed the online contents such as posts, comments, and shares by social media users. The study triangulated the interview material with the online content.

For the third case study, nine interviews were conducted with members of the Kurdistan parliament. These figures were equally distributed among all five political parties who won in this election. During the interview, they were asked how they used social media for political campaigning and what kinds of impact they experienced from using social media for electioneering and campaigning. They were also asked how social media helped the parties and candidates to achieve their political objectives and how social media expanded the scope of their communication with citizens. Lastly, they were asked how social media changed the relations between the party leaders and citizens during the election campaign.

With respect to collecting online data, this study collected samples from the social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Facebook was mainly used as it is the most popular platform among Kurdish citizens. The data was primarily collected from Facebook pages and accounts of parliamentarians, who are active online, accounts and pages of party leaders of the PUK and the KIU, websites of the PUK and the KIU, and fake and pro-party accounts and pages.

This study did not use Social Networking Analysis (SNA) technique for data collection, as this technique is incompatible with the research questions and design. Furthermore, SNA is more appropriate for quantitative studies. Moreover, SNA can be

used to gather information on interaction around specific topic inside social media networks.

4.4 Considerations of Ethical Issues⁷

The panel review from the department of Politics and International Studies – University of Warwick approved the project and ethical considerations submitted to the panel. In collecting data for this study, the researcher carefully took ethical issues into consideration. During the process of data collection many standard ethical issues were taken into account: protection from harm, maintenance of privacy, freedom from coercion, informed consent, and institutional review boards. With respect to the protection of safety of participants, before conducting the interviews, the researcher asked participants to choose a place they felt safe and comfortable. During the interview process, the researcher completely avoided any activity that could cause possible psychological harm or stress for participants. The researcher completely avoided exerting any social pressure on participants to force or manipulate them to state something that appeases the researcher. Also, the researcher avoided reacting to the interviewees' answers.

To maintain privacy and correctly store data, before starting the interviews, the researcher obtained the participants' consent to record the interview's audio. They were also notified that any information given would not be shared with a third party and the interviews would be treated confidentially and only used for the research.

⁷ The First Year Review panel approved this project and ethical consideration on 18th February 2015.

With respect to freedom from coercion, the participants were informed that their participation in the project is voluntary. If they decided to withdraw, there would be no penalties, and they were not obliged to provide an explanation for their reasons for withdrawing. The researcher notified participants that they had the right to request a copy of the audio recording of the interview and ask to have the audio recordings be permanently deleted at any time. They were also informed that participants are not obliged to answer all questions: they had the right to refuse to answer. They were under no obligation to reveal information.

Before each interview, the researcher fully briefed participants on the interview procedure, and informed them of their rights. The participants were informed of the nature, duration, and purpose of the study, their role in the study and how the information would be used. They were also given a consent form in accordance with regulations and guidelines of the University of Warwick. The interviewees signed two versions of the consent form. In the form, there were several options presented to participants, regarding mentioning their name and treating the giving information; it also provided the contact details of a third person from the University of Warwick if participants had any questions or concerns after the interviews.

The researcher conducted all the interviews in Kurdish language, and then the interviews were transcribed and translated into English language. The interviewees were chosen in agreement with the researcher's PhD supervisors. For the case of the Slemani movement, the interviewees were prominent leaders of the movement, journalists, and activists who covered and actively participated in the movement. For the case of political parties, the interviewees were leaders from both parties, especially those who

have social media accounts and pages (Facebook, or Twitter, or both). For the 2013 parliamentary elections, the interviewees were those parliamentarians who used social media accounts during the election campaign, which are still active.

In addition to interviews, data was collected from the participants' social media accounts. To further examine the reliability of interview data, the researcher triangulated the interview statements with social media analysis.

4.5 The Data Analysis

After conducting the interviews, the recorded interviews were transcribed. Then the text cleaned up by removing content irrelevant to the project. After this process, the transcripts were separated into meaning units grouped under different themes. Additionally, the most commonly used approach, known as 'Ad Hoc Meaning generation', followed to analyse the interview data. According to Kvale (1996), this approach

Consists of different approach and techniques for meaning generation, and no standard method is used for analysing the whole of the interview materials. There is instead a free interplay of techniques during the analysis (Kvale, 1996: 203).

With respect to analysing the collected data, this thesis aimed to analyse and interpret the data using two approaches. The first approach identified the main themes that emerged from the field notes and transcriptions of the interviews. The second approach involved developing a narrative to write interpretively about a situation,

episode, events or instances. The data was analysed in the light of the theoretical underpinnings developed in the Chapter Two (Kvale, 1996; Powell and Renner, 2003; Kumar, 2011).

When analysing Facebook accounts and pages of parliamentarians and party leaders, the accounts and pages were first verified to confirm that the accounts and pages are real and belong to real individuals, because there are countless fake accounts in the name of politicians and party leaders. Then, the study examined the content posted on these accounts and pages and categorised and examined the content. There was particular emphasis on its purpose. These accounts were been observed constantly throughout the research period (2014 until 2017). For the third case study, the parliamentary elections in 2013, data was collected from the online archives of parliamentarians in 2013.

Chapter 3

Democracy and Democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan:

An Overview

1 Introduction

Since the 1991 uprisings against the Baathist regime, politics in IK has changed dramatically. The uprisings occurred after continual suppression by successive Iraqi governments since the creation of new Iraq in 1920; they allowed IK to gain semi-autonomy from the Iraqi central government and run the region politically and economically since that time.

This chapter attempts to familiarize the reader with IK's politics and its democratization process since the 1991 uprisings. It concentrates on the internal politics of IK, more specifically with the process and challenges of democracy transformation. It does not engage with every single political development in-depth, as it is not the purpose of this chapter to do so. However, the key political developments will be highlighted to show how the democratization process started and the status of this process.

1.1 The Creation of IK

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War (1914-1918) led to the creation of different nation-states under European rule and the division of the Kurdish people among the newly-created states of Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran, against

their will (Stansfield, 2003; Yildiz, 2004; Katzman, 2010). Following the Lausanne treaty in 1923, Britain and the League of Nations attached Mosul province (Mosul Vilayet) and the rest of current-day Iraqi-Kurdistan to the provinces of Baghdad and Basra to create the modern state of Iraq (Romano, 2006; Yesiltas, 2014).

Since the creation of Iraq in 1920, successive Iraqi governments (from the Monarchy until Ba'athist regime under Saddam Hussein) did not want to consolidate Iraqi Kurds into successful and democratic nation-building policies, and ultimately failed in integrating their aspirations within the new state politics. According to Yesiltas:

The inclination of the authorities in Baghdad to see any compromise with the Kurds as the beginning of a perilous process, which will culminate in eventual Kurdish secession, resulted in the constant perception of the Kurdish question as a national security threat by successive Iraqi governments (Yesiltas, 2014: 42).

The majority of these governments depended on exclusion policies and did not recognise the political rights of Kurds (Romano & Gurses, 2014; Yesiltas, 2014). As a result, the Kurdish people faced systematic and various forms of suppression and persecution. These policies pushed the Kurds in Iraq under the leadership of Mullah Mustafa Barzani and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) under Jalal Talabani's leadership to revolt against the Iraqi governments and resist these policies (Yildiz, 2004).

After the Baath party's military coup and defeat of the communist regime of General Abdulkarim Qasim in 1963, and Saddam Hussein's seize of power in 1979, the

Kurdish people faced very strong repression by the Baathist regime. The political ideology of the Baathist party was based on 'Arabisation' through an amalgamation of non-Arab nations, including the Kurds, into a single Arab nation (Matthews, 1993). To put this political ideology into effect, the Baathist regime employed both military and non-military methods. From 1970 to 1974, the Baathist regime conducted a wide campaign to change the demographic character in the Kurdish area especially in Kirkuk and Mosul provinces. Many Kurdish villages in Kirkuk were destroyed and replaced with new Arab settlements from the centre and south of Iraq. Kurdish government officials were transferred to areas outside the Kirkuk governorate and replaced with Arab civil servants and workers and Arabic names were given to the Kurdish market, quarters, streets, and schools (Yesiltas, 2014).

In response, the Kurdish militants known as 'Peshmarga' fought with the Iraqi army: during this conflict, thousands of people were killed (Yildiz, 2004). In 1980, Iraq entered a bloody war with Iran that lasted until 1988; Kurds living on the Iraq-Iran border suffered badly during the Iraqi army's military campaign. Between 1986 and 1987, the Baathist regime planned and executed a sinister operation, which committed genocide against the Kurdish people. It was named 'Anfal', the name of a chapter from the Holy Quran. More than 182,000 civilians were killed and more than 5000 villages were destroyed (Romano, 2006; Yesiltas, 2014). Additionally, the Baathist regime used chemical weapons against the Kurdish people: in 1988, Halabja, a town the most prominent example of Chemical Attack, which used mustard gas and other chemicals. More than 5000 civilians, most of them women and children, were killed, and more than 10,000 were wounded and displaced (Romano, 2006; Yildiz, 2004).

In 1988, the Kurdish political parties formed the Kurdistan Front; this Front and the Kurdish people were waiting for an opportunity to revolt against the Baathist regime. This opportunity appeared as a new political situation developed in the relations between Iraq and Kuwait (Yildiz, 2004; Onley, 2009; Bismarck, 2013). When the war between Iraq and Iran ended in 1988, Iraq had huge amounts of debt and it needed to recover economically from the war. The only way to achieve this was through oil revenues. However, Kuwait's policy regarding oil exports resulted in lowering oil prices in the international market. Iraq demanded Kuwait consider Iraq's financial and economic burdens regarding oil exports, but the diplomatic endeavours were unsuccessful. Thus, in 1990, Iraq launched a military campaign against Kuwait; Iraq occupied Kuwait and ultimately entered another devastating war with the United States and its allies (Matthews, 1993; Long, 2004). This war, known as the 'Second Gulf War', resulted in the expulsion of Iraq's army from Kuwait in 1991 and the destruction of most of Iraq's military, economic and infrastructure capabilities and the imposition of a comprehensive embargo on Iraq by the United Nations Security Council which lasted until 2003 (Browne, 2003; Yildiz, 2004). The consequences of this war encouraged Kurds in the north and Shias in the south to revolt against the Baathist regime.

1.2 The 1991 Kurdish Uprising

Following the declaration of a ceasefire between Iraq and the International Coalition in 1991, President Bush Sr. called on the Iraqi people and military to revolt against the Baathist regime. Consequently, Kurds in the north and Shia in the south revolted against the regime and in Kurdistan. Within weeks, Kurds and the Kurdistan

Front (composed of the KDP and the PUK Peshmarga) controlled the Kurdish autonomous region and the nearby oil-rich city of Kirkuk (BBC, 1991). When the Kurds controlled most of the Kurdish areas and provinces, they hoped for the United States' support, which would allow them to reach their historical dreams. Instead, the United States and its allies remained silent, and ignored the regimes' retaliation against Kurds and Shias. Retreating from Kuwait, the Iraqi army launched retaliatory aerial and ground attacks on Kurdish and Shiite communities, killing thousands of Kurds and displacing many others. The Iraqi army brutally punished the Kurdish population for rising up against the central government by chasing them out of their homes in the middle of winter to the snow-capped mountains of Kurdistan. In this retaliation campaign, between 30,000 and 60,000 people were killed by the Iraqi regime. In the north, 1.5 million Kurds fled across the mountains into Iran and Turkey (BBC, 1991; Ahmed, 2012).

In response to this humanitarian catastrophe, the United Nations Security Council approved Resolution 688 in April 1991 which called on the Baathist regime to withdraw all its military and administrative units, established a no-fly zone in northern Iraq, and provided a safe haven for Kurds in Iraq (The United Nations, 1991). This resolution was important for the Kurdish case, because it

Internationalized the Kurdish question by mentioning the Kurds for the first time since 1923 and empowered the United Nations for the first time to intervene in the internal affairs of a member state such as Iraq (Ahmed, 2012: 7-8).

The resolution aimed to ensure the territorial integrity and independence of Iraqis under a democratic constitutional, parliamentary and pluralistic structure, the end of the repression of the Iraqi people (The United Nations, 1991). However, neither the resolution nor the international community allowed Kurds to include the Kirkuk Province within IK. Kirkuk is a city with various ethnic population and different religious doctrines including Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Sunni, Shia, and Christians. The city has a huge amount of natural resources, including oil. These two factors became source of conflict between the Kurdistan region and Baghdad's successive governments; it brought regional intervention to the city's affairs (Anderson and Stansfield, 2009). The United Nations identified the 36th parallel as a separate line between the Kurdistan region and Iraq, which only included the Erbil, Slemani, and Duhok provinces (Ahmed, 2012).

2 The Challenges of the Democratization Process in IK (1991-2003)

The withdrawal of the Baathist regime administrative and military units from the Kurdistan region created an administrative vacuum in the region. To fill this vacuum, the Kurdish political parties (principally, the KDP, under the leadership of Masoud Barzani and PUK, under the leadership of Jalal Talabani) held free elections in the three provinces they controlled in 1992 and established the Kurdistan Regional Parliament (KRP) in the shadow of the Western forces (McDowall, 2004; Ahmed, 2012). The first Kurdistan parliament election was carried out on May 19, 1992, and nearly one million citizens voted. There were no further parliamentary elections in IK until 2005. The 1992 election was supervised by representatives of a number of foreign organizations such as

Human Rights Watch, Members of the European Parliament and foreign journalists. Each party had to gain a minimum of (7%) of the votes to have representation in the Kurdistan parliament (Kurdistan Parliament, 2014). In this election, the KDP obtained 50.8% of the votes, while the PUK obtained 49.2%. The two parties were equally balanced in the new and first Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) (BBC News, 2011). Despite the KDP's slight majority, the PUK formed the cabinet with the KDP via dividing parliamentary seats, cabinet posts and other positions between themselves equally; this is known as 50:50 policy (Stansfield, 2003; Leezenberg, 2005; Harris, 2015). The formation of KRG was important for the region to prosper and step toward democracy and stabilization; however, the process was not free from defects: it 'provided ample opportunity for corruption' (Leezenberg, 2005: 638).

The Kurdistan Regional Government – KRG - was born in a very exceptional political environment. Two rival political parties KDP and PUK formed the KRG. The KDP was established in 1946 was led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani until the failed Kurdish revolution in 1975. The KDP mainly depended on support of Kurdish tribes and the political structure of the party appears to be more tribal. In 1975 and due to political and ideological differences inside KDP, Jalal Talabani, a former leader of the KDP who mainly represented left-wing groups, formed a new political party called the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Since its establishment, the two political parties struggled against each other (Stansfield, 2003). Both parties had grassroots' support in different parts of the Kurdistan region. According to Gunter (1998) KDP's grassroots support is more located in conservative, feudal, and tribal areas associated with the Kurmanji-speaking, Bahdinani area of North-Western IK. On the other hand, the

grassroots supporting the PUK is more leftist, socialist, intellectual, and progressive; it is associated with the Sorani-speaking area of South-Eastern IK (Gunter, 1998).

The new Kurdish government suffered from several challenges, which ultimately led to the outbreak of the civil war (1994-1998) and the divide of the Kurdistan region between KDP and PUK. The parties did not settle their historical differences when they created the Kurdish government (Gunter, 1998). The practice of democracy in Iraq generally and Iraqi Kurdistan particularly was a new experience for political parties and the Kurdish populace, the ability of Kurds to establish a democratic government was greeted with intense scepticism (Watts, 2014).

The social, economic and political situations in IK were problematic to the process of democratization. Gunter (1996) highlights three key problems to democratization:

Primordial loyalties, proliferation of guns and armed militias, and the disastrous economic situation; each of these problems is enough to prevent the institution of a Kurdish democracy (Gunter, 1996: 240).

Other challenges also accompanied the lack of democratic traditions, such as the weakness of government institutions, the absence of the rule of law, and most notably the inability of the government to disarm PUK and KDP militants and reorganize them in a national and unified modern army (Stansfield, 2003; Natali, 2010). Despite this, the economic confrontation was the primary reason for outbreak of the civil war between KDP and PUK. The parties did not agree on distributing revenues that

come from different sources such as tariffs and NGO financial donations (Yildiz, 2004; Natali, 2010; Defronzo, 2010). Stansfield (2003) concluded that

The two leaders effectively wielded political power, but did not affiliate officially with the administration, in either the legislature or the executive, resulting in a weakening of the governmental structure (Stansfield, 2003: 152).

The operation of government structures in decision-making processes strongly depended on the political bureaus of both political parties; the stability and coherence of government structures strongly relied on the political balance between both parties (Stansfield, 2003).

External factors also greatly contributed to the outbreak of the civil war in IK, such as the regional struggle and power politics between Iran and Turkey. However, both regional states had a common aim, to prevent the establishment of a Kurdish state in the northern Iraq: Turkey supported the KDP and Iran supported the PUK (Gunter, 1998; Leezenberg, 2005; Defronzo, 2010). From 1995 to 1997, the fighting between the two political parties brought the regional powers into the civil war. In August 1996, the KDP conducted a joint military operation with the Baathist regime army to expel the PUK from Erbil and Slemani cities: the PUK lost most of its territory. The KDPs justification for this alliance was that it perceived PUK-Iranian joint forces as a threat to Iraqi territorial integrity. In response to this operation, the PUK, supported by the Iranian military, was able to recover most of the territory it had lost including Slemani (Gunter, 1998; Yildiz, 2004; Defronzo, 2010). In May and October 1997, the Turkish forces escalated their support for the KDP by bombing PUK and PKK positions and

actually approached the cities of Erbil and Kirkuk. In the largest intervention to date, a reported 50,000 Turkish troops entered IK (Gunter, 1998). In 1996, IK was divided between both political parties and both parties established their own governments. With respect to this, Stansfield (2003) writes that:

The KDP consolidated its hold on Erbil and established the third cabinet of the KRG under the premiership of Dr Roj Nuri Shawaise with Nechervan Barzani as his deputy. Similarly, the PUK secured its own stronghold of Slemani and established its own third cabinet, again under the premiership of Kosrat Rasoul (Stansfield, 2003: 154).

Alongside these developments in IK, the United Nations Security Council ratified 986 Resolutions, which would have permitted Iraq to sell certain amount of oil in return for the purchase of food and medicine. This resolution and other resolutions that were ratified, such as Resolution 1153 in 1998, dramatically increased the amount of oil sales allowed to 5.256 billion dollars every six months (Hisso, 2008). IK directly received 13% of the funds from the sale of oil with no return to the Iraqi central government. This fund contributed enormously both economically and socially, because the fund was used in many different industries, such as medical services, restoring electricity, agriculture, water services, food and medicine supplies, education, and resettlement of those displaced by the civil war. These resolutions somewhat eased the economic difficulties in Iraq, but did not bring prosperity and welfare to the Iraqi people. The resolutions were positive developments for IK particularly, because IK was under two embargos at that time. One was the international embargo imposed on Iraq,

which also covered the Kurdistan region. The second was the embargo of the Baathist regime on the region after the 1991 uprisings. To an extent, these resolutions mitigated the conflict between the KDP and the PUK. The implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 986 eased poverty, diminished Talabani's resentment over Barzani's unwillingness to share the income from the lucrative customs assessments on Turkish truckers who pass through the KDP area, but not through PUK areas (Makovsky, 1998; Qadir, 2007; Hiss, 2008).

In addition to this resolution, a series of diplomatic endeavours by the United States and other Western states ended the open conflict between the KDP and the PUK. Both parties signed an agreement in Washington DC in September 1998, known as 'the Washington agreement'. In this agreement, both party leaders pledged to work towards the re-establishment of the elected regional parliament and government (Leezenberg, 2005). The agreement aimed to create a peaceful, unified IK, and acknowledged many economic and security benefits for both political parties such as revenue-sharing, power-sharing including elections, and security arrangements, and a larger role for the international community in helping to stabilize the new regime (Makovsky, 1998; Osman, 2001). After signing the agreement, both parties formed the Higher Coordinating Committee (HCC) to implement the agreement. However, the lack of confidence and trust between KDP and PUK was the main obstacle to the agreement. Both parties' high-ranking leaders arranged several meetings and visits to Erbil and Slemani to resolve their disputes but none of these efforts brought profitable results (Osman, 2001). On the contrary, after this agreement, IK remained divided between the KDP and the PUK. According to Harris,

The plan was to create a peaceful, unified IK, but in reality it remained divided into two de facto governments. The KDP controlled the North-Western Kurmanji-speaking provinces of Dohuk and Erbil, and PUK dominated the South-Eastern Sorani-speaking province of Slemani (Harris, 2015: 2).

The Washington agreement was a positive step towards security and stability for the people of Kurdistan region, as it eliminated internal fights and even, according to some witnesses, established a healthy competition between the sides to demonstrate the greater administrative efficiency (Makovsky, 1998).

However, this stability and security was at the expense of democracy and establishing an accountable government. Each party worked on consolidating their economic and political powers and excluded other political parties, which lived under their controlled territories. There were two administrations, two cabinets, two paramilitary units (Peshmerga), and two flags (Stansfield, 2003; Khalil, 2009). The region has since 'been caught up in a complex process of overcoming administrative division' (Tomàs and Villellas, 2009: 13). The two parties did not work on modernizing social and cultural compositions of Kurdish society; instead, they continued to capitalize on these structures. Khalil highlights that 'the two spheres of influence are centred on patronage networks and tribal politics' (Khalil, 2009: 21).

Within their spheres of influence, both parties monopolized the economic and financial resources and utilized them to empower and strengthen their position and popularity. Both parties used their own economic policies to their party and members

rather than the public. These economic policies intensified under the oil-for-food program signed by Iraq and the UN in 1996. According to Leezenberg (2005) after the Kurdish civil war, despite the continuing UN embargo, the oil-for-food deal contributed to the flourishing of IK's economy (Leezenberg, 2005). However, these economic policies were not formulated in accordance with economic models in liberal democracies. The economic policies developed and operated directly by leaders of the parties within their own spaces and were monopolistic. The economic model developed under the KDP and the PUK did not help ordinary citizens financially. Under the leadership of KDP and PUK, the regional government was converted into a family business, empowering and enriching members of their own families, friends, and party members and alienating nonpartisan Kurds. The two parties alternated the premiership of the KRG between members of their own families and relatives. In addition to claiming that the KDP and the PUK supported a free-market system, the both parties each even controlled mobile telephone companies in their separate regions and provided limited access to local residents to communicate with relatives and friends on the other side. The constituencies of both parties became frustrated with them and became increasingly vocal, demanding free speech and press rights, greater administrative transparency, and an end to corruption (Ahmed, 2012).

Despite dividing IK between KDP and PUK into two spheres of influence, the region was not completely separated between the two parties. People in both areas could move between provinces: university students from Slemani were able to study in Erbil and Dohuk and vice versa. The commercial activities between PUK area and KDP area continued. This was helpful in bringing Kurds of different regions closer together,

harmonizing their relationships, improving public communication, and preventing regionalism (Ahmed, 2012).

This situation continued until 2003 when the United States and its allies invaded Iraq under the justification of stopping Iraq from developing weapons of mass destruction and because of Iraq's support for terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaida. The change in the Iraqi regime generated a new era in Iraq and tremendously affected the internal politics of the Kurdistan region.

3 Democracy and Democratization in IK: 2003 and beyond

3.1 IK's Democratic Features

Since the Kurdish uprisings in 1991, IK had the opportunity to work towards establishing a democratic political system. Despite the challenges of democratization process in IK, which will be addressed in detail in this chapter, the region has achieved some democratic progress. In IK, there is a chance for pluralism as law granted freedom of political parties and political groups with having rights to enter election and compete with other political parties for seats in parliament and conduct their political activities. In addition to political pluralism, the power is not formally concentrated in the one single institution or figure. Although there is no constitution in IK to identify the power of legislative, executive and judiciary bodies, but these three bodies exist and they have their respective spheres of influence. For example, parliament issues law and monitoring government affairs, government is executing laws from parliament and managing public affairs, judiciary looking at legal cases and adjudicating disputes. However, each of these bodies is suffering from critical challenges (Hars, 2016).

In IK, political parties also have their own media outlets. These media outlets are mainly broadcasting the political view of political parties. Party media outlets broadcasting information of political and economic status of IK and hosting political debates. These media outlets also engage with conducting election campaign and advertise for their own candidates (Chomani 2014). IK succeeded in achieving progress in a number of sectors including property rights, religious tolerance, women's rights, equal access to education and a vigorous political opposition (Hars, 2016). While there was partial progress in these sectors, in some respects, IK appears to be an authoritarian political system. This issue will be addressed in detail in the following sections.

3.2 Failures of Democratic Transformation in IK

The 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in New York were a turning point in the United States (US) foreign policy toward terrorism in the world. After overthrowing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq was the next target in the US' foreign policy agenda. The Bush Jr. administration classified Iraq, Iran and North Korea as the 'axis of evil' and accused them of sponsoring terrorism and attempting to develop weapons of mass destruction. This resulted in the US launching a military campaign against the Baathist regime, which ultimately resulted in the overthrowing of the regime, and the US and its allies occupying Iraq in 2003 (Cameron, 2005).

Changing the regime in Iraq was a very significant political event for the Iraqi people generally, particularly the Kurdish people. The regime had ruled for more than three decades and it had brought war and destruction to Iraq and the Kurdistan region.

The nature of the Baathist regime and its way of ruling left no hope for Kurds in Iraq to reconcile with this regime, and ultimately the Kurdish people in Iraq considered this invasion as an opportunity to free themselves from the Baathist regime, and actually Kurdish Peshmerga participated to some extent in removing Saddam Hussein from power. The removal of Saddam Hussein and the US' efforts to establish a pro-western democratic political system in Iraq created an opportunity for democratic transformation in IK.

In the post-Saddam era, people in IK hoped that the new era could provide a democratic transformation in the region. However, if one closely examines the latest political developments and democratic transformation in IK, one can conclude that the region is still struggling and has serious challenges that require a comprehensive program and efforts to implement reform and establish standardized good governance.

3.2.1 Power Sharing

The political reality after the removal of the Baathist regime from power in 2003 and the US' efforts to rebuild the Iraqi state democratically, compelled the KDP and the PUK to cooperate to deal with the new political developments in the post-Saddam era (Danly, 2009). This coordination crystalized in putting their enmity aside and presenting a unified front to the American-led coalition and the rest of Iraq in order to legalize their autonomous status and consolidate their position at the national level (Khalil, 2009; Danly, 2009; Katzman, 2010). By 2007, both parties reached an agreement and formally declared the unification of both Erbil and Slemani administrations.

This agreement was called a ‘strategic agreement’ or ‘de facto constitution’ because it was not only a simple agreement between two political parties. Through this agreement, both parties together ruled IK and excluded other political groups from real power sharing for many years. They were, however, united and addressed ‘the issues facing KRG with one voice’ (Fatah, 2012).

In an interview with Saadi Ahmad Pira, a political bureau member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), he stated that the agreement is important for achieving stability and harmony in IK; because of it, people in Kurdistan live in peace, the economy is progressing, and the political system is working (Ahmed, 2012). However, the opposition criticized the agreement and considered as a conspiracy to divide the wealth of KRG (Fatah, 2012). Abdulla accused the two leaders of sharing ‘the oil income and wealth of Kurdistan between themselves and their families and cronies’ (Abdulla, 2012).

Although this unification was a significant step towards IK’s democratization, the process suffered challenges, which ultimately prevented the KRG from presenting a successful pattern of good governance. While the introduction of the unification agreement stated that it would guarantee a growing democratic experience in the Kurdistan region’, the precise mechanisms designed to achieve unification will not achieve that objective in the near future. For example, the unification agreement specifically grants KRG government posts to either the KDP or PUK; accordingly, the unification was achieved in accordance with (50:50) politics as it was in the 1990s. The unification agreement excluded ministries, which constituted the source of power and influence, such as the ministries of finance, interior, and Peshmerga affairs (Tomàs and

Villellas, 2009; Khalil, 2009). The unification of these ministries was postponed, following further negotiations, but these ministries remained separated, controlled, and managed in accordance with the interests of both parties. As of the time of this writing, KRG have not succeeded in unifying the Peshmerga forces in one modern army: the forces are loyal to the KDP and PUK but not to the KRG. This is partly due to the lack of legal framework, such as a constitution, which could provide a plan for the unification of Peshmerga. Scholars, like Khalil (2009), believe that speaking about a unified Kurdish government is a sort of mirage. He writes that,

In reality, while many people refer to a unified KRG, there are really two KRGs, each controlled by one of the two main political factions (Khalil, 2009: 21).

Additionally, the agreement on unification included merged ministries, but the agreement did not remove the distrust and bad blood between the two parties. The unpopularity of the agreement was growing between some PUK medium and high cadres too since they felt that the agreement reduced their party to a mere puppet in the hands of the KDP (Fatah, 2012). The same sentiments were expressed by KDP leaders and cadres, which ultimately led top leaders of both parties to hold several meetings to renew the agreement between them in accordance with new political developments in IK, and the interests of both parties (The Kurdish Globe, 2014).

3.2.2 Peaceful Transition of Power

Through examining the process of democratic transformation in IK after 2003, it is possible to draw a mixed picture about the political reality in this region. One way is

to begin with the principle of peaceful transfer of power among political parties as an indicator for democratic transformation. Although there are many political parties in the region and law regulates the formation of parties since the first parliamentary elections in 1992, IK did not witness any other parliamentary elections until 2005. This implies that power did not transfer from one political party or group to another. According to Kadir (2007), this has caused 'most of the crises and sufferings that faced the region recently' (Kadir, 2007: 44). This idea confirms that the distrust and fear of being removed by each other and losing power, is not easy to overcome in the foreseeable future.

Despite holding three parliamentary elections in IK in the years 2005, 2009, 2013, the process of peaceful transfer of power did not take place in accordance with liberal democratic societies. Both the KDP and the PUK participated in the 2005 and 2009 elections as one list and when they gained the majority of votes they shared government positions equally in accordance with the 50:50 politics. As Qadir (2007) concluded in the 2005 parliamentary election, the two dominant parties ran on the same list so as not to compete, and divided power equally according to their leaderships' pre-election agreement (Qadir, 2007). In the 2009 election, the KDP and the PUK created one list named the Kurdistan List headed by Barham Ahmed Salih to run the elections, despite the fact that Goran, which had separated from the PUK, took 25 seats from PUK seats in parliament. Forming one list by the KDP and the PUK in the 2009 elections was a clear indication that the two dominant parties were attempting to maintain their duopoly within the KRG (Danly, 2009). Even in the 2013 elections, which were crucial for all political parties especially the KDP and the PUK, because all political parties

participated with their own list, no real transfer of power took place as both the KDP and the PUK and other political parties formed a coalition government.

Additionally, during these elections, political opportunities and resources were not equally available to all political parties in IK. The KDP and the PUK, the parties in power, use the public budget and the resources of government agencies for their election campaigns, while other parties, the Change List (Goran), the Kurdistan Islamic Union (Yakgrtu), and the Kurdistan Islamic Group (Komal) are independently funded. This variation in resources and the political opportunities allowed the KDP and the PUK to dominate Kurdish politics. Even in some occasions, those two parties exerted pressure on other parties through cutting off financial aid, burning the headquarters of other political parties and assaulting them as a punishment for their peaceful opposition to PUK and KDP domination in political life (Orsam 2013).

Interestingly, the absence of power transfer is not only limited between political parties, but also it is hard to see power transfer within political parties. Chomani (2013) considers that Kurdish political parties struggle to change their leaders and transfer power among leaders. He argues that:

Almost all Kurdish political parties in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq are really in need of a change in their leadership. The main leaders are still the ones we have seen dominating the political arena for the last four decades of Kurdish politics; yet they remain unchangeable for many reasons. The main leaders have not allowed other political figures to become powerful for fear of

being replaced and so new political charismas have been marginalized. Meantime, power has been handed down to family members and others have remained on the periphery (Chomani, 2013).

From this perspective, we can conclude that, if changing leadership did not take place inside Kurdish political parties, then it cannot be expected to see the same process among different political parties through democratic mechanisms.

3.2.3 Institutionalization and the Power of Democratic Institutions

With respect to the intervention of political parties in government affairs and the relationship between political parties and government apparatus, it is possible to claim that the KRG has not achieved a substantial progress yet in mitigating party domination over government institutions. In her observation for KRG, Watts (2011) asserted that

State-society relations under the KRG can be described as clientelistic and hierarchical. KRG governance is distributive, party-state governance with the two major parties controlling access to the resources of almost every sphere of political and economic life' (Watts, 2011).

Similarly, Frazer believes that the KRG still struggles to unify the PUK and KDP administrations and removing party influence in running government institutions. He highlighted that

All the KRG governmental institutions fall under the direct control of either of the two ruling parties. The PUK

- controlled Slemani province has established numerous educational institutions, similar to those in the KDP-controlled provinces of Erbil and Duhok, leading to misallocation of resources (Frazer, 2011).

The intervention of political parties in government affairs did not stop only at the ministry level; political parties interfere even in education institutions, places of worship, and markets. This type of intervention in public life resembles the style of the Baathist political party when it controlled all aspects of Iraqi society. Both the KDP and the PUK repeated the same style as their form of governance (Qadir, 2007). Kadir writes about the intervention of Kurdish political parties in public life, highlighting that:

After dividing IK between the KDP and the PUK, and under the governance of both parties, totalitarianism gradually appeared, both parties stretched their wing not only over all government institutions, but the entire public life in Kurdistan. It was hard for ordinary citizens to gain any rights such as postgraduate study or doing business if they are not members in one of these parties. Political parties controlled all aspects of public life such as government institutions, civil society groups, finance, wealth, and economy, even those places, which have nothing to do with politics such as university and higher education (Kadir, 2007: 356).

Additionally, Mahmoud (2011) and Tomàs and Villellas (2009) argue that in IK, government action and political-party action are intertwined at all levels. Famous party members are also government officials, and government decisions in the region are primarily political-party decisions; furthermore, the economy, both public and private sector, in these regions is dominated and managed by party apparatuses. Even the security, intelligence and military services show clear loyalties to the political parties. The two parties are omnipresent in almost every public sphere (political, economic, judicial, media, social) and the strength of the connections between the main parties and the government limits its independence and ability to separate or criticize them (Tomàs and Villellas, 2009; Mahmoud, 2011).

It appears from these analyses that after two decades of self-governing, the KRG is still incapable of rescuing itself from the domination of the KDP and the PUK. Government institutions are still not separated from the influence of political parties; the KDP and PUK still implement a policy of merging government with their party policies. These problems remain challenging for the KRG in its efforts at achieving a successful model of governance for years to come.

3.2.4 Corruption and Failed Administration

With respect to corruption and transparency, it is evident that IK does not have a positive record; the region suffers from corruption and the semi-absence of transparency and accountability. As a phenomenon, corruption was not widespread in government institutions before 2003 (Rizgar, 2007). However, the phenomenon has developed since the division of IK between the KDP and the PUK in several different forms such as

stealing the regions income, diverting the region's income for the internal life of both political parties, stealing the budget by government officials, economic monopoly legally and practically, bribery, supporting corrupt persons and protecting them from being prosecuted (Kadir, 2007).

Kurdish government officials and party leaders in both the KDP and the PUK extensively and on many occasions bragged about the political and economic progress they had achieved since 1991; there are examples of progress in Kurdistan (Clark, 2008), but their people accused them of corruption, nepotism, power grabbing, and of paying no attention to their constituencies' basic needs and aspirations. There is a widespread and prevalent perception among citizens that an excessive corporatism on the part of the KDP and PUK exists. It is also claimed that there is a serious lack of transparency and accountability with respect to public spending, with cases of corruption documented and condemned in the media not being investigated by legal authorities (Tomàs and Villellas, 2009; Ahmed, 2012). Recently, a leaked document exposed that thousands of people receive retirement benefits illegally under the Ministry of the Peshmerga, and hundreds of people receive fraudulent retirement benefits from the public income, while serving within political party organisations. The positions include the post of Minister, General Director and other key governmental positions (Kurdish Policy Foundation, 2014).

Following the invasion of Iraq, billions of dollars poured into the region, mainly through international development programs, large-scale international money laundering and natural resources exporting, and the regions share of the Iraqi budget (Natali, 2010; Karem and Chomani (a), 2015). In 2007, the KRG budget reached six

billion dollars as its share of Iraq's oil revenues. However, there is a growing gap between ordinary Kurds and the political elite; a Kurdistan businessman stated, “corruption is like a virus. It is killing Kurdistan” (Clark, 2008). In this respect, Ari Harsin, a member of the Kurdistan parliament states,

Sometimes Kurdistan seems like a mafia state. There is no transparency. The PUK and the KDP are dividing the budget of the Kurdish Regional Government between them, 52% for the KDP and 48% for the PUK. It is a very strange model of democracy (Clark, 2008).

Furthermore, observers in IK believe that the two political parties developed an oligarchy regime with clientelist and kleptocratic practices. They believe that this regime has opened the way for monumental failures politically, economically and in terms of government performance as well as the burgeoning grievances of the populace. After two decades, KRG policies and plans for a flourishing economy in the region largely failed. In this respect, Karem and Chomani (a, 2015) observe that both parties, for example, purposefully discouraged growing internal products of agricultural wealth in villages and the countryside and they linked farmers with their political parties through paying them some amounts of money for political purposes. They wanted to buy votes and strengthen their private militias. Sadly these local despots have managed to inflict huge damage on society in two decades, which the enemies could not achieve in nearly a century (Karem and Chomani (a), 2015).

The financial crisis that faced the KRG as a result of the Iraqi central government in 2014 cutting the region's budget proves that KRG in fact has a fragile

economy, because it struggled to pay monthly salaries for its civil servants without its share of the Iraqi budget. IK is in a far weaker economic state than the KRG had anticipated. The KRG budget is dominated by a 750 million dollar per month wage bill for civil servants. Under KRG, the region is producing hardly any goods and its economy relies heavily on revenues from oil and gas, which means the region's economy is not diversified (Mufid, 2014).

The oil and gas sector has high levels of corruption. In 2014, *the Kurdistan Tribune* website prepared a special report about how officials from both the KDP and the PUK controlling the process of contracting, registering companies and competition regulation. The report documented that

There are certain officials who are chairing 12-16 committees in the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) and have complete power over them. The allocation of members and their chairmen is also political. The blocks that are based in the KDP-controlled zones are chaired by members of the KDP, while the blocks based in PUK-controlled zones are chaired by MNR officials belonging to the PUK (*The Kurdistan Tribune*, 2014).

The report further underscores the nature of the link between political parties and officials, which forms a fertile ground for corruption, highlighting that 'the MNR official owes his loyalty to powerful and influential politicians who could therefore have a decisive say in the awarding of a service contract. According to industry insiders,

there are few service companies in both areas that are not linked to one or more politicians (*The Kurdistan Tribune*, 2014).

It is reasonable to extrapolate that other ministries also suffer from the corruption caused by party intervention in their affairs. This however does not mean that the KRG and Kurdish parliament do not take these challenges seriously. Efforts to overcome these challenges are ongoing. One thing worth mentioning here is approval for the Oil and Gas Law by parliament, which aims to achieve a basic, transparent management for natural resources in IK.

3.2.5 The Rule of Law and Accountability

The lack of rule of law and accountability is the biggest challenge that faces democracy in IK and has allowed many other problems to emerge such as corruption and party's interventions in government business. The political history of IK since 1991 shows that the KRG itself started by violating law when KDP and PUK formed the cabinet in accordance with political compromise with 50-50 politics (Kadir, 2007). If violating law in the 1990s was normal due to the political situation which IK went through, no one can now justify weakness in the rule of law after two decades of autonomous and self-rule in the region.

According to International reports on IK and local observers, the region did not achieve much in consolidating the rule of law. According to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Human Rights Office, many detainees in KRG prisons do not have access to a lawyer or have been arrested without being informed of the charges against them. In many cases, KRG security forces do not allow detainees to

contact their families (UNAMI, 2013). In IK, the security forces (Asayish) have their own courts and judges, which are completely separated from civilian courts and not supervised by the Ministry of Justice. These security courts follow political party orders precisely and mostly investigate prisoners illegally (Qadir, 2007).

When someone speaks about the rule of Law in IK, the primary insight given is that law in IK is like a spider's web that cannot arrest big insects. There are too many cases where the law is completely absent. For example, in cases of killing journalists, the law has a minimal role in finding assassins and holding them accountable. In 2009, a Kurdish journalist, Soran Mama Hama was killed in Kirkuk and the law did not find his killer(s) (Mohammad, 2014). Again in 2010, a young Kurdish journalist named Zardasht Osman was kidnapped in Erbil and then found dead in Mosel city, but nobody was punished for this crime (Alaaldin, 2010). In 2013, another journalist named Kawa Garmyiani was killed because he announced on his Facebook account that he has evidence on some corruption cases of PUK officials. He was killed in front of his house and the law could not prosecute his killer (*The Kurdistan Tribune*, 2013). In addition to these crimes, there are many corruption cases reported by the media but the law cannot do anything about them (Karem & Chomani (a), 2015).

The main reason for this problem comes from political interventions in the legal system and judiciary affairs. After dividing IK between the KDP and the PUK, both parties systematically worked to impose their domination over government institutions, including judicial power. Political parties from 1991 until recently would directly intervene in the appointment of judges and general attorney staff. Organs of political parties such as the political bureau or council of leadership had recommended most of

these judges and general attorneys. In such circumstances, these judges and general attorneys will not investigate cases party leaders are involved in. Leaders of both parties intervene in court affairs by pressing independent judges not to open investigations in specific cases or release specific criminals or corruptors close to one of the political parties (Kadir, 2007). In 2005, KDP supporters and members attacked Kurdistan Islamic Union offices (KIU) in Duhok city because the KIU only decided to participate in Iraqi parliamentary election with an independent list. In these attacks, four members of the KIU, including two leaders of KIU were killed. In 2011, the same scenario was repeated but without human casualties. In both cases the judicial system were completely absent in arresting and punishing the criminals, because a high member of the KDP was indirectly accused of both attacks (*The Kurdistan tribune*, 2011).

Orsam's report on democratic transformation in IK documents many violations in the legal system and indicates that rule of law in IK is still deficient. Such legal violations include physical and psychological torture against suspects, extracting confession by coercion, changing information in documents and files of certain issues that are not closed, the weakness of the courts in the face of some issues related to two parties in power or tribal pressure, threats and pressures on judges not implementing decisions taken by judges in certain cases, and giving verdicts in favour of the parties in power (Orsam, 2013). Bamarny (2012) argues that

If we had judicial officials who would punish offenders
and their wrongdoings, and who would side with the
victim and uphold justice, we would not have had so many

political problems and our people would not have been left without an active government (Bamarny, 2012).

3.2.6 Media and Freedom of Speech

Although KRG officials claim that freedom of speech is guaranteed by law in IK (Law number 35 of 2007),⁸ during the political unrest, the security apparatus treated freedom of speech negatively. Human Rights Watch reports on IK claim that freedom of speech is under attack in the region (Human Rights Watch, 2013). In her evaluation for freedom of speech there, Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch states,

Instead of ensuring the justice system investigates high-level corruption, the Kurdistan Regional Government is ignoring its own laws to protect free speech and assembly, and using ‘laws’ that are not in force to silence dissent (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

International and local non-government organizations (NGOs) have recorded many cases where Kurdistan security forces (Asayish) practice different violations against journalists, political activists, and political opposition figures such as detention, arrests without warrants or charges of trail, prosecution, and even murder. Catastrophically, law and the judicial system do not investigate or prosecute the majority of these violations or perpetrators (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Metro Center, 2013). In an interview with Jadaliyya website, Asos Hardi, general director of the

⁸ <http://www.perlemanikurdistan.com/files/articles/221008121630.pdf>

Awene (Mirror) Company for Publishing who also was attacked in August 2011 by a group of men, comments on the freedom of speech in this way:

Our main problem is that there is no guarantee for the freedom we have achieved in the KRG. Meanwhile, there are two administrations—KDP and PUK—on the ground, and that has made the KRG chaotic. Many of the higher officials within the KRG and the two ruling parties have their own thugs. Unfortunately, these thugs attack journalists in the centre of the cities. Most times, investigations go nowhere (Chomani, 2014).

Additionally, law number 35 of 2007, regarding freedom of speech also has some defects and there is an urgent need for further amendments. The law basically covers the written media only, and does not involve other types of media such as electronic media or social media activities in the region.

However, this does not mean that KRG is not taking any steps to improve the situation. There is some progress in reducing these violations. Law number 35 clearly prohibits any limitation or legal prosecutions against journalists. The Kurdistan parliament also passed a law called (the right of obtaining information in IK – Law number 11 of 2013⁹). However, the main problem is the politicization of security forces in Kurdistan, and their leaders use them against those who speak against both parties and their leaders.

Regarding the media, from 1991, IK has witnessed a continual increase in the number of media outlets. According to a report prepared by Reporters Without Borders

⁹ <http://www.perlemanikurdistan.com/files/articles/120713023536.pdf>

the number of media outlets in 2010 reached over 850 including newspapers and magazines (Reporters without Borders, 3013). This tremendous number of media outlets is a positive phenomenon because they provide opportunities for those who want to write or express their ideas, however media outlets in IK suffer from serious challenges.

The biggest challenge is independence. The media sector is not independent of political parties, which own the majority of media corporations, and these media outlets are politicized (Abdulrahman, 2007). It lacks 'a clear structure, identity or mission while also being too parochial, politicised and subject to manipulation by political parties and businessmen' (Karem and Chomani (b), 2015). With the outbreak of the civil war between KDP and PUK in 1994, media outlets were divided between Erbil and Slemani areas. During the civil war, the media become one of the weapons used by both parties as propaganda machines to attack each other with insulting language and promoting hatred and violence. Currently, political parties invest huge budgets in establishing pro-party media outlets with high quality technology (Karem and Chomani (b), 2015).

Despite that negative picture of the media in the Kurdistan region, the efforts of establishing independent media outlets away from the domination of political parties continue. Since 2001, some independent newspapers and satellite channels emerged, such as the Hawlati and Awena newspapers, and NRT satellite TV. The Change Movement (Goran) emerged in the 2009 elections with the assistance of IK's independent media. However, the size of the emerging independent media in comparison with political parties' media is very small. This is mainly due to a lack of financial resources, while political parties dedicate a huge budget to their pro-party

media (Abdulrahman, 2007; Chomani, 2007). Interestingly, the aim of establishing pro-party media by political parties, especially KDP and PUK was to confront independent media outlets and launch campaigns against the contents of independent media. In this regard Chomani (2014) writes that ‘after the emergence in 2000 of Daily Hawlati, the first free Kurdish media outlet, the KDP and PUK began establishing a number of media outlets to undermine the independent media. These outlets are widely referred to as the shadow media, as they claim to be independent but are subservient to their respective political parties (Chomani (a), 2014).

Through monitoring KDP and PUK treatment with independent media and journalists, it is possible to state that the independent media in IK face serious challenges. As previously mentioned, journalists face physical and psychological censorship such as the threat of arrest, detention, prosecution, and even murder. The majority of the victims of this treatment are independent journalists from independent media (Abdulrahman, 2007; Metro Center, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2013; UNAMI, 2013; Chomani, 2014). In the 2011 protests in the Slemani governorate and riots in Duhok, supporters of both parties burned NRT satellite TV and KNN satellite TV in Erbil and Speeda satellite office in Duhok for covering the events in both cities (*The Kurdistan Tribune*, 2011; Hlidkova, 2011). After the burning of the NRT Satellite, a Kurdish journalist from NRT wrote a letter to Barack Obama, president of the United States on March 2, 2011 saying:

We feel abandoned by all. We are being intimidated and
continue to receive death threats warning us not to resume
broadcast. If this event goes without strong international

measures, we believe that the future of democracy and free media in Kurdistan region will be in jeopardy (Hlidkova, 2011).

Recently, on Saturday April 11 2015, 3000 copies of number 299 of *Living Magazine*, and independent magazine, disappeared in the Erbil governorate. The Chief Editor of the Magazine Ahmad Mira said in a press conference that

Views of several politicians and observers on extending Masoud Barzani's presidential term was published in the stolen issue our magazine, which seemed Erbil authority did not like it (Millet, 2015).

These acts reporting on the media landscape in IK explain how democratic IK is when media, as one pillar of democracy, struggles with political parties.

4 The Emerging Change Movement (Bzutnaway Goran) and the Opposition Front

One of the remarkable developments in the political history of Iraqi Kurdistan is the emergence of the Change Movement (Bzutnaway Goran). In 2009, Nawshirwan Mustafa, a veteran politician who was a co-founder of the PUK and a close aide of Jalal Talabani, felt that the aging Iraqi president was leading the PUK to its demise by pursuing a policy subservient to Massoud Barzani's KDP and realized that reform within the PUK was not achievable. Being a veteran fighter, and intellectual with leftist tendencies whose image remains untainted by corruption, Mustafa managed to take many of the PUK's fighters and leaders with him when he split from the party and

formed the Goran Movement (Ali, 2013). The Goran movement created hope for those who wanted reform and change in the KRG and political landscape in IK. The movement achieved popularity especially among KRG youth, by offering a new option in Kurdistan: uprooting rampant corruption is one of Goran's main objectives (Ali, 2013; Chomani (b), 2014).

The emergence of this movement had direct implications for IK's politics. In the 2009 Kurdistan parliamentary election, the Goran Movement won 25 seats, the movement in coordination with Kurdistan Islamic Union (Yakgrtw) and Kurdistan Islamic Group (Komali Islami) formed an opposition front with 45 seats. From 2009 until 2013, IK witnessed opposition inside the Kurdish parliament for the first time since 1991. The opposition worked extensively to confront corruption in the public budget and dilapidation of public wealth of the region, but it was limited (BBC, 2013; Mohammad, 2013). In fact, this period was an important test for the power of opposition; it was not easy for the KDP and the PUK to pass their projects without resistance from the opposition. Additionally, with the Arab Spring protests, the Goran movement called for the dismantling of KRG and early parliamentary elections. In this respect, Chomani (2013) observes that:

The movement shook the Kurdish political scene during its first four years in parliament, using its strong media presence to break silence on the public budget, corruption and lack of transparency over oil revenue, and human rights abuses. Goran's demand to use Kurdistan's oil revenue to fund social programs for the poor appealed to a

populace that had seen PUK and KDP party cronies get rich virtually overnight (Chomani (c), 2013).

In the 2013 Kurdistan parliamentary elections, the movement won 24 seats and came second largest block in the Kurdistan parliament after the KDP, with the PUK the second party since the 1990s ranked as third even after change movement (BBC, 2013). The election results indicate that none of the parties can form a government alone because none of the political parties received a majority of votes, so they formed a broad-based government (Chomani (b), 2013). Since the 2013 parliamentary elections, politics in IK has taken a different direction. This new direction appeared in efforts to form KRG cabinet, in which the opposition front appeared as a very important player.

This election had created many political results that changed the Kurdish politics in the coming years. One of the results of 2013 election was that the two-party system, the most important characteristic of the Iraqi Kurdish politics since 1991, no longer exists. The political dynamics stemming from the conflict and/or collaboration between the KDP and the PUK have been replaced by a multi-equilibrium game and a more complex structure. Apparently, the PUK lost the largest number of seats, only retaining 18 seats. The main reasons for the PUKs defeat in this election rested on three factors: organizational problems, the absence of Jalal Talabani from the political landscape due to illness, and a weak campaign (BBC, 2013; Erkmen, 2013). The second political outcome worth mentioning is that the strategic agreement seems to have expired between KDP and PUK. This agreement signed in 2007 allowed both parties to share power and wealth equally between them without other political groups participating. After the 2013 election, it was not easy for the KDP and the PUK to continue on the

same course, as KDP leaders believe that the decline in the PUK votes will not allow them to work with the agreement any more. Due to the rise of other political forces, such as Goran and Islamic political parties, both parties adopted new policies in dealing with the latest political developments in the region (Awlla, 2013). The KDP adopted a broad-based government; however, implementing this policy practically was a difficult mission. For that reason, the formation of KRG cabinet took about nine months. This meant that it was not easy for both the KDP and the PUK to continue on the same policy, dividing everything equally.

In this cabinet, all opposition parties, Goran, Yakgertw, and Komal, participated and took some important ministries. The opposition basically called on the KDP and the PUK to conduct a comprehensive reform as a prerequisite to form the new cabinet. In the new cabinet, the opposition received some important ministries. The Goran movement, for example, received the Ministry of Peshmerga affairs (equivalent to the Ministry of Defence) and the ministry of economic and finance. In this cabinet, the KDP and the PUK apparently shared power with opposition parties, but the reality was different. Omer Enayat, a member of Kurdish parliament from Goran list expressed his deep disappointment because his party could not do anything about reform, and the main obstacle is both the KDP and the PUK officials. In an interview with Awena newspaper Enayat stated,

I did not agree with Goran's participation in this cabinet, because Goran had a very comprehensive and effective plan for reform. Not only the KDP and the PUK do not allow the implementation of this plan, they also try to

distort it. Working with the KDP and the PUK resembles hitting cold iron, you can see how difficult is for Goran's ministers to work in this government. For that reason, it is in Goran's interest to withdraw from this cabinet as soon as possible (Awena, 2014).

This statement reveals the size of the challenge that the former opposition parties face in doing any reforms in this cabinet, because any reform potentially means weakening the influence of both the KDP and the PUK, which is definitely intolerable to them.

Additionally, recent political developments in IK after the 2013 parliamentary elections revealed democracy is still fragile and not consolidated. For example, in the case of regional presidency, Masoud Barzani refused to step down when his period concluded in 2013. On 30 June 2013, the KDP pressed on the PUK to extend Barzani's presidential period through parliament until 2015 without conceivable justifications. When his time concluded again in 2015, again Barzani did not step down from his position due to war with so-called the Islamic State (ISIS). Moreover, on 12 October 2015, the KDP and Barzani paralyzed parliament by not allowing the speaker of parliament to return to Erbil, and also expel the Goran's ministers from the KRG cabinet by force, because the Kurdistan parliament conducted two session to amend the regional presidential law and reduce power of regional president and make Kurdish political system parliamentary system (Alkadiri, 2015). Some scholars considered these political developments as a big regress of democracy in IK, and even the possibility of ignition of another civil war (Hassan, 2015; Natali, 2017).

5 Conclusion

In the light of what has been presented, it is possible to state that the road of democratic transformation in IK and its political future is uncertain. The region needs to make great effort to further develop its democracy in order to be a model for Iraq and the whole region. Although the elements of democracy exist in Iraqi Kurdistan, such as pluralism, separations of powers, legislatives, executive and judiciary bodies, multi-party system, and elections, IK is still at the beginning on the road of democracy. The powers of democratic institutions suffer from intervention of the key political parties: the KDP and the PUK. Corruption is highly diffused and IK does not possess a standard economy. The rule of law and judicial system is very weak and cannot provide social justice. Iraqi Kurdistan is indeed heading toward authoritarianism rather than democracy as most of curtail powers dominated by two main families, Barzani and Talabani families. The region has negative reputation in guarantying freedom of expression because there are continual cases of killing journalists, activists and influential figures. Therefore, the following chapters assess the role of social media in contributing to democratic development in IK.

Chapter 4

Social Media, Social Movements and Democratization: The Case of the Slemani Movement in 2011

1 Introduction

On 17 February 2011 in Slemani city, IK witnessed massive protests against the KRG. These protests can be considered as the first social movement to emerge since the 1991 Kurdish uprisings. The Slemani movement demanded the dismantlement of the political party rule, the establishment of real democracy, and good governance. It has been claimed that protesters used social media actively to participate, organize, mobilize, and publicize the movement's message and political objectives. This chapter asks, how the rise of social media influences political participation of citizens and what the value of that participation for democratic consolidation is in IK. It also asks what the benefits and risks of social media for political participation and the democratization process are in IK?

This chapter operationalizes theoretical insights developed in Chapter Two under the title 'political participation as influencing attempt'. Theoretical considerations suggest two lines of arguments: the first sees social media as a useful resource that significantly impacts political participation and involvement in protest and social movements to achieve democratization. This is because online platforms facilitate mobilization, communication, coordination of collective action, dissemination of

information, leadership, formation of online groups and communities, gaining publicity and public attention internally and internationally, and bypass traditional censored media. The second line of argument argues that the Internet and social media have a negative impact on political participation and democratization because authoritarian governments use these online resources to practise censorship and surveillance, disinformation and crackdown on social movements, gathering information about strategies of social movements and activists, developing counterinsurgency strategies, converting online tools to further empower their rules, and publish propaganda and pro-government contents across the networks.

This chapter concentrates on the Slemani movement in 2011 and attempts to use these theoretical insights to answer the above questions and assess the potential of social media for political participation and democratic consolidation in IK. It consists of four sections. Section 2 explores the environment behind the emergence of the movement and ignition of protest. The third section empirically analyses the impact of social media on political participation in the movement and to assess the implications for democratization. The fourth section presents a brief conclusion. This chapter argues that, although social media platforms were important tools for facilitating political participation in the Slemani movement, the movement was unsuccessful to influence the KRG to introduce democratic reforms in IK because the KDP and the PUK security agents used forces and online tools to suppress the movement.

2 Understanding the Slemani Movement in 2011: Context and Development

2.1 The Implications of the Arab Spring

In 2011, some Arab states witnessed dramatic, rapid and unexpected changes. The popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt led to the removal of authoritarian regimes in both states (Castells, 2012; Joseph, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013). The political developments in the Arab world had a huge influence on other countries in the region (Watts, 2016). Due to similarities in internal circumstances, the sparks of protests also reached Iraq and Kurdistan region. The Slemani protest¹⁰ can be regarded as the first Kurdish social movement in the modern history of IK (Healy and Schmidt, 2011; Human Rights Watch (b), 2011; KNN, 2014). Under the influence of the Arab Spring, political activism in IK also began to develop. In particular, the Hosni Mubarak's resignation hugely influenced people in Kurdistan; according to Mohamed Rauf "in some public places activists hung banners and was written: congratulation on toppling another dictator, hope the others follow" (Rauf, 2014: 56).

After removing autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt, the Goran Movement¹¹ issued a declaration in 29 January 2011. It referred to the importance and consequences of the Arab political events for IK, and said:

We are in Kurdistan while welcoming this wave of
change; in the meantime, we are concerned that the current

¹⁰ Known as 'Khopishandanakani 17ay Shubbat - the 17th of February 2011 protests'

¹¹ The Goran Movement was an opposition party in 2011

Kurdish authority did not make any effort toward establishment of truly democratic system and social justice. Instead, the KRG created a completely politicized and tyrannical system (Rauf, 2014: 341).

In the declaration, Goran called for the dissolution of the Kurdistan parliament and the KRG, and demanded early and impartial parliamentary elections within three months (Ahmad, 2011). In response, the KDP and PUK described the declaration as an attempt at a coup against the KRG and provoking disorder in Kurdistan (Ahmad, 2011; Salih, 2011; Rauf, 2014). A PUK leader, Qubad Talabani, wrote that ‘No one doubts the need to improve governance and the delivery of services in Kurdistan. We are not yet Switzerland, but we are certainly not Egypt or Tunisia’ (Talabani, 2011).

Besides this declaration, a civil society group¹² decided to organize a peaceful gathering in Slemani city centre to congratulate and show solidarity with the Tunisian and Egyptian nations (Salih, 2011; Ahmad, 2011; CNN, 2011; Hardi, 2015; Mustafa, 2015). The group stated:

We present our warmest congratulations and absolute support for the both nations, because the people of IK are suffering from the same political, social, and economic crises that both nations suffered from (Rauf, 2014: 56-57).

Despite the variations in degrees, there are similarities between internal economic, social, and political circumstances of IK and the Arab states (Saravan, 2015). The accumulation of twenty years of corruption, mismanagement, human rights and

¹² Known as (Tori Bargri la Maf w Azadyiakani Khalk – Network of Defending the Rights and Freedom of people – NDRFP)

freedom violations, and lack of basic services encouraged Slemani citizens to protest (Salih, 2012). According to Yahya N. Ali, 'Kurdish citizens considered Kurdish officials like those in Egypt and Tunisia, because they are all corrupt and dictatorial' (Ali, 2015). Similarly, Haval Abubakr (2015), one of the gatherings organizers explained that the 'KDP and PUK monopolized and politicized all aspects of Kurdish society. They converted society into a unique, closed and single colour' (Abubaker, 2015).

As Sherko Mustafa, one of the movement leaders remarked,

The Arab spring events increased people's courage in Kurdistan to protest. It removed the illusion that dictators are unchallengeable and unbeatable; instead it told people that confronting authoritarianism and achieving change through mass protests are possible (Mustafa, 2015).

After finalizing the gathering of the civil society group, some of the participants marched through Mawlawi Street in Slemani to Salim Street to make their way home. Several government and party buildings are located on Mawlawi Street. When the protesters reached the KDP office, they chanted slogans against Kurdish rulers, and confrontation soon broke out between protesters and the KDP officials. (Rauf, 2014; Abubakir, 2015; Ali, 2015; Hardi, 2015). It is unknown why the confrontation happened because the police did not investigate the incident.¹³ The crowd reportedly started throwing stones at the KDP office and smashing windows (Kurdish Views, 2011).

¹³ To see the video of shooting
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGKpFTzDz2U>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFnQqiLDA70>,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63ZW5FCU2g>).

Consequently, the KDP guards and cadres opened fire on the crowd, killing one person and injuring many others (Moradkhin, 2011; Salih, 2011; Ahmad, 2011). This incident ignited further protests; waves of demonstration erupted in Bar Darki Sara which were dubbed with different names such as Jasmine Revolution or Martyrs Revolution. According to Haval Abubaker, ‘the guards opening fire at our fellow citizens encouraged us to break silence. It is unforgivable’ (Abubaker, 2015).

Interestingly, the protests turned into a social movement. The initial the bloody clash between the KDP guards and protesters turned into peaceful, non-violent civil resistance to the KRG (CNN, 2011). The movement presented several concrete demands to the KRG, which were similar to the Tunisian and Egyptian demands during their revolution. They included establishing a democratic parliamentary system, ending the politicized government by the KDP and the PUK, fighting corruption, nationalizing the Peshmerga forces, police and security apparatus, and drafting and ratifying a national constitution in the interest of the people (Moradkhin, 2011). The protesters presented a set of national demands for the whole of IK. The demands were a practical translation of the problems and democratic transformation of the region (Qadir, 2015; Ali, 2015). Yahya Ali (2015) a protest activist noted that ‘the protests were only organized in Slemani, while the demands, grievances expressed were the demands and grievances of the whole people of IK’ (Ali, 2015). The demands gathered participants with different political backgrounds and political ideologies who shared the same goals and objectives (Mustafa, 2015; Abubaker, 2015).

At the beginning of the protests, the opposition front (Goran, the KIU, and the KIG) declared that they had nothing to do with the protests, for fear of being targeted by

the KDP and the PUK. Nawshirwan Mustafa, the general coordinator of the Goran Movement, issued a statement in which he condemned attacks on the political parties' buildings and described those who threw stones at KDP office as disordered and anarchic mobs (Salih, 2011; Qadir, 2015). However, the opposition parties recognized the protestors' demands as legitimate. For example, Salahaddin Mohammad Bahauddin, the secretary-general of the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), stated that if 'the KRG does not do reforms and resolve the problems, the people will not have mercy and will not forgive the KRG' (Ahmed, 2012). The opposition front further supported these demands when they presented a 'reform package' to the KRG as a road map to conduct comprehensive reforms in the region (Kamal, 2014).

Despite official condemnation by the opposition, KDP supporters attacked Goran offices in Dohuk and Erbil, and surrounded the KIU politburo office in Erbil. Therefore, the opposition parties realized that it was better for them to indirectly support the protests. These supports were visible through active participation of some party leaders in the protests (Al-Tamimi, 2011; Karda, 2011). Consequently, the continuation of protests in Slemani encouraged other areas and towns to protest too. In a short time, protests were being carried out in Halabja, Chamchamal, Kalar, Kfri, Ranya, Sharazur, and Garman. Protesters in these areas expressed their support and solidarity for the Slemani protests and made the same demands. The Kurdish diaspora in European countries also organized supportive gatherings to show solidarity for the Slemani movement (Sbeiy (a), 2011; Sbeiy (b), 2011).¹⁴

Due to the differences between the KDP and the PUK strategies of dealing with political contestation, and the social and political environment between the two areas,

¹⁴ (See the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DcDwTeujtY>)

the protests did not reach Erbil and Duhok. PUK security forces controlled Slemani and its suburbs and generally there was a space for expression under the PUK in comparison with Erbil and Duhok, while the KDP hardly allow dissent to be expressed (Ahmad, 2011; CNN, 2011; Jamal, 2011; Rauf, 2014; Ali, 2015). However, the KDP suppression strategies did not prevent attempts to organize protests in Erbil and Duhok. For example, in the afternoon of April 18 in Erbil, dozens of armed men in civilian clothes attacked students from the University of Salahaddin with knives and sticks, as they tried to hold a demonstration, and arrested 23 protesters (Human Rights Watch, 2011; KNN, 2014). The KDP also deployed its party security agents in civilian clothes among people in the markets, bazaars, and public places. These agents heavily monitored any unusual movements, as the KDP 'Informally declared a state of emergency. Several people were beaten or threatened because they wanted to protest' (Ali, 2015). Spreading the protests in other towns made both the KDP and PUK deploy their party security militants to control the situation (Rauf, 2014).

Along with the protests, local and international non-government organizations responded to the events. In this respect, Dale Prince, a spokesman for the U.S. Consulate in Erbil expressed the US' support for the rights of people to demonstrate to demand democracy and a better life. Additionally, local and international NGOs condemned opening fire on protesters as a violation of freedom of speech (Wilgenburg, 2011).

The formal institutions in IK, such as parliament and government bodies also responded to the events. On 3 March 2011, Masoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Region and the former President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani both sent letters to the

protesters, recognizing that peaceful protest is a right (Nuchenet, 2011; Rauf, 2014). Also, on 9 March 2011, the Kurdistan parliament also held an exceptional session to discuss the developments in Slemani governorate. In the session, parliament members discussed withdrawing legitimacy from the KRG cabinet headed by Berham Ahmed Salih from the PUK. Parliament voted on the issue but did not withdraw legitimacy from the KRG (Ahmad, 2011; Samad, 2011; Rauf, 2014). Additionally, the Kurdistan parliament sent a committee to Slemani to identify the facts, which then presented its findings to the parliament. In the light of the committee's recommendations, the parliament issued two important decisions, which included 17 points.¹⁵ The decisions formally recognized and integrated the protesters demands and referred clearly to punishing the KDP guards who opened fire on protesters in front of the KDP office in Slemani, and compensating those who been killed or injured by the guards (Mustafa, 2015). However, the government ignored these decisions.

The KRG Prime Minister, Berham Ahmed Salih also appeared responsive to the situation. He stated in his speech on 9 March 2011 in the Kurdistan parliament that

Demonstration is a legitimate right of our fellow citizens
to request their rights. However, we all have responsibility
to protect safety in order to maintain the Kurdistan region
unit and strong. We must attempt to solve our problems in

¹⁵ (Decision number 1, 2011) <http://www.perlemanikurdistan.com/files/articles/150311114506.pdf>
The text of the decision No. 2 was not published in (Waqaei Kurdistan – Realities of Kurdistan) newspaper by the parliament presidency in order not to be formally recognized as parliament decision.

our parliament as the only legitimate reference point of the region and its people (Samad, 2011).¹⁶

He also contacted the protesters directly, and visited the families of victims¹⁷ (Mustafa, 2015). Unfortunately, Salih's cabinet failed to normalize the situation. His cabinet could not conduct a neutral investigation, was incapable of ending KDP and PUK hegemony over government affairs, and unsuccessful in bringing real democratic changes. According to Chomani, because Salih was only the Prime Minister of Slemani, he was not able to arrest the criminals, neither was he able to stop the violence that the two ruling parties have used since he gained power. The criminals of 17th of February 2011 are walking the streets despite court-issued arrest warrants (Chomani, 2012).

Because the KRG ignored the protesters' demands, they remained for 62 days in the Maidani Azadi (Freedom Square). During this time, various social, political and cultural groups and factions protested in various ways. They presented two proposals for the KRG to conduct a comprehensive democratic reform in IK. The first proposal, presented on 10 April 2011, was entitled 'peaceful transfer of power in the Kurdistan Region'. The second was entitled 'social and political contract in the Kurdistan region' (Rauf, 2014). However, the KRG officials ignored these proposals.

After 62 days of protest, the KDP and the PUK ended the protest forcefully. On 6 March 2011, dozens of masked, armed men arrived in unmarked military vehicles at Freedom Square and attacked the protesters by beating them with sticks, and burned their tents (Human Rights Watch (b), 2011; Mustafa, 2015). Protesters fought back, and 50 protesters were injured. This situation continued until 19 April 2011, when the KDP

¹⁶ (To see whole speech of Berham Salih in Kurdistan parliament on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLD98WOrQG4>).

¹⁷ (See the visit on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQc1uTPRjd0>).

and the PUK security forces cleared Bar Darki Sara from the protesters. As a result of using force, 10 were killed and hundreds were also injured (Rauf, 2014).

The decision to use force was purely that of the KDP and the PUK: there is no evidence to prove that the Prime Minister, Barham Salih, gave the order to use force. The KDP and the PUK security intelligences played a major role in silencing the dissent (Chomani, 2011). Suppressing the movement created a negative picture for the nascent Kurdish democracy and protection of human rights (Human Rights Watch (b), 2011). Ultimately the first Kurdish movement for democratic transformation and the IK's version of the Arab Spring remained unsuccessful. However, the Slemani movement has become a celebrated moment in IK's history (Abubakir, 2015). Activists have established a website and Facebook page in the name of the movement. The website and the page record human rights violations in Kurdish and English language.¹⁸ Activists remember the movement as a symbol of struggling for democracy and freedom in IK.

3 The Impact of Social Media on the Slemani Movement

The Slemani protests were considered a movement in which social media played a significant role in facilitating its emergence. It is possible to analyse the influence of social media on the movement in different ways, including mobilization, coordination, communicating movement messages, and risks of social media for the movement.

¹⁸ Website: <http://www.17shubat.com/index.php/ku>
Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/17shubatMedia>

3.1 Social Media, Communication, Mobilization, and Coordination strategies in the Slemani Movement

Research indicates that social media are powerful in facilitating communication capabilities, engagement with political activities such as signing petitions, boycotting, protesting, and demonstrating. They also offer users the opportunity to utilize collective knowledge, and means to communicate, participate in and drive the political process themselves (Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008; Adams, 2009; Brundidge and Rice, 2009; Rahimi, 2011; Jensen and Anduiza, 2012; Colombo et al, 2012; Castells, 2012; Towner, 2012; Breuera et al, 2014).

Prior to the Arab Spring uprisings, the online political activism in IK was arguably under construction. Apart from those who already politically active, criticizing the KRG for corruption, injustice, and politicizing government institutions were rare activities on social media. The users, mostly youths, engaged with social media for non-political issues, (Ali, 2015; Hardi, 2015; Abubaker, 2015; Ali, 2015; Mustafa, 2015).

With the outbreak of the Arab Spring uprisings, in which the social media played a critical role, social media in IK witnessed new developments and they started to influence the Kurdish political landscape. One of the effects is about being connected with other contexts. Social media helped to connect Kurdish citizens with the Arab world events. Asos Hardi, a journalist based in Slemani and editor of Awena newspaper, observed that

Social media showed youths in IK giving huge attention to the Arab Spring revolutions. If there was any new development in the Arab states, the online Kurdish users

republished and shared the online contents across social networking sites. Social media became a sphere where people spoke about the Arab Spring events (Hardi, 2015).

Hardi's observation motivated by his direct observation and monitoring of social media platforms. The importance of social media was not limited to connecting the Kurdish citizens with the Arab Spring events. The Kurdish users imitated the Arab activists in using social media for political activism and mobilization for demonstrations. Muhammad Rauf, journalist and political activist highlighted that Kurdish users have created several popular Facebook pages,¹⁹ these pages expressed aversion and called for protest against the narrowing scope for freedom of expression, rampant corruption, inequality and injustice in IK (Rauf, 2014). Moreover, San Saravan, a Kurdish journalist who covered the protest activities for foreign media and reposted on social media platforms for 62 days and arrested twice by Kurdish security forces, stated that 'this new way of communication evolved from earlier happenings. The use of social media in the Arab world is bigger than anywhere else' (Vucht van, 2012). In closed societies, social media provides an opportunity for citizens to express their feelings about injustice, oppression and collective grievances and to form social and political pressures on authorities (Mustafa, 2015). In the context of IK, the Kurdish citizens called though social media as the first place for demonstration.

When the protests ignited, social media became a vital element in the protest activities and for mobilization and coordination. Social media allow citizens to form groups without formal institutions and organization. Online groups are not limited by

¹⁹ Such as Jasmine Revolution Group, Kurds Outrage, and Mass Protest. (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/304095302974293/>)(<https://www.facebook.com/17yshubatGoran/?fref=ts> ; <https://www.facebook.com/Shaqam0/?fref=ts>).

geographic boundaries or the need for face-to-face communication, and social media use can generate trust between users. Additionally, social media generates online communities where protesters and users may link and share their aspirations with thousands of online members outside of the protest (Mustafa, 2015).

In the Slemani protests, social media became a vibrant platform able to mobilize various protesters, coordinate and arrange their activities outside formal political organizations such as political parties. They also allowed users to communicate 'time, arrangements, and locations of protests' (Hardi, 2015). They also 'facilitated our affairs such as being aware of protesters, informing about the activities, and communicating with other protesters without depending on a political party or any other form of organization' (Ali, 2015). Rebin Hardi highlighted his experience, where every night, he and his friends would post their day's activities on Facebook. the online platforms were also used to announce the activities of the next day, disseminated, received, and shared information about which personality will attend the protests and what is he going to say' (Hardi, 2015). Informing about activities, and the dissemination of information and news through Facebook importantly provided a complete and transparent picture about the next round of activities (Saravan, 2015). Crucially, social media not only allowed the protesters to communicate, to plan and strategize, the online platforms also surpassed geographical borders by involving the Kurdish Diasporas in Western countries: they demonstrated solidarity with the Slemani movement (Abubaker, 2015; Mustafa, 2015).

These statements indicate that social media enabled activists and protesters to easily organize collective action. Previously it was very difficult for a group of individuals to connect and mobilize each other to participate in a protest. Additionally, organizing collective action without support from a political organization was made easier by social media. Alongside communication, social media enabled protesters to find like-minded individuals and create online groups. These online groups share similar political perspectives, opinions, and sense of grievances and outrages inside and outside Slemani. They facilitated communication among them to plan and strategize their next activities. They were capable of sending and disseminating various messages under pseudonyms (Abubaker, 2015; Rebwar Ali, 2015; Mustafa, 2015; Saravan, 2015). Many protesters using social media for communication used pseudonyms, which was important as it allowed them to bypass online monitoring conducted by security forces.

Furthermore, social media offered protesters power and energy to continue participating in the Slemani movement. Rebin Hardi, a prominent journalist based in Slemani and one of the protest leaders, commented that ‘without social media, the protesters’ enthusiasm might shrink very quickly as they would be isolated from each other, and unaware about other’ protesters’ actions’ (Hardi, 2015). Also, Asos Hardi believes that social media were necessary to ‘amplify the echo of our message and unable to continue on our activities’ around the world (Hardi, 2015).

Additionally, social media have had a considerable impact on overcoming fear of authoritarian regimes. In the Arab world, along with communication power enabled by online social media, people gained significant levels of political experience, which led to breaking down the regime’s obstructive barriers (Salamey and Pearson, 2012).

Some protesters may have feared participating in collective action; however, in the Slemani movement, social media helped people in overcome fears of participation. According to Rebin Hardi, a write and one of the protest leaders in Slemani movement (2015)

Social media were important in unifying major groups in society and made them feel powerful, not excluded, and not alone. Protesters felt that the movement was massive and assisted them to overcome their fear. Because in the protests, participants may have a fear that the protestors may be small, and the majority of fellow citizens will not support the protest cause. But social media offered reassurance to citizens that participants are countless, huge, and have support from other places. Facebook is filled out with contents supportive for the movement. This sentiment was important in motivating protesters to remain on street for 62 days (Hardi, 2015).

Similarly, San Saravan argued that social media boosted self-confidence, which was important for previously suppressed individuals. Social media helped those suppressed voices to feel that they still exist and still can be heard. It was like returning the will for people who had lost it before (Saravan, 2015). Sherko Jawdat Mustafa, one of the leaders of Slemani protest and leader of KIU, remarked that ‘when supports and solidarities were expressed via Facebook to the movement, it was possible to feel that there is an army backing the movement’ (Mustafa, 2015).

From these perspectives, it is possible to state that psychological empowerment is important for individuals to overcome their fear and participate in the protests. Social media can be useful tools in bringing that empowerment directly for these individuals. Additionally, social media resources enable citizens to be part of online protest activities by sharing, posting, and commenting on online contents related to the protest activities.

In social movements, leadership can be considered as an important element in their formation, continuation, and operation. In the social media era, protest leadership has witnessed significant transformation. In the contemporary digitally fuelled movements, the prominent characteristic is that they do not have a single leader, instead have a horizontal network of social media activists not subjected to formal leadership hierarchies who supervise and lead the movements (Tufekci, 2014). Neither political parties nor even independent prominent figures led the Slemani movement. In fact, in the context of IK, it was and still is difficult for the protesters to coordinate their activities under the leadership of formal political organization. Political parties in IK, including the former opposition parties²⁰ do not support demonstrations and protests as means of political engagement and do not offer an appropriate space for individuals to organize protests. Therefore, individuals may search for another platform, such as social media to organize protests where necessary. As Yahya N. Ali highlighted, social media ‘allowed users to bypass organizational limitations of political parties and led protests by themselves’ (Ali, 2015).

Despite the fact that the movement had a council to supervise and run the movement, the council’s decisions were not obligatory; some famous activists with

²⁰ (Goran, Kurdistan Islamic Union – KIU- and Kurdistan Islamic Group -KIG)

different political backgrounds ran the council who had no history in organizing political activism. Facebook pages and accounts offered instructions, guidelines and directions for the movement. According to Haval Abubaker, one of the protest leaders ‘protesters wished for messages supportive to the movements aspirations, messages that truly reflected what the protesters wanted and expressed to their demands’ (Abubaker, 2015).

Even more, political activism in social media and protests in the street compelled IK’s opposition parties to change their political discourse in favour of the movement (Ali, 2015). The same issue was also noticed in other contexts such as the 2011 Egyptian uprising and the 2013 Gazi Park movement in Turkey. In these instances, protesters also used social media platforms for connecting like-minded individuals. However, the Internet leadership of protests may not always be effective in bringing democratic change.

3.2 Social Media, Citizen Journalism and the Spread of Information in the Slemani Movement

The role of social media in developing citizens’ journalism, spreading information, and establishing political discussion among users in times of protests is recognized among scholars. Via social media, citizens can obtain more capacities to affect the flow of information. As opposed to mainstream media, online users became the creator, sender, and receiver of news and information.

When the Slemani movement started, social media and mobile phones were the first tools that the Kurdish protesters depended on to record videos, upload to YouTube

and spread them through Facebook. San Saravan commented that social media allowed ordinary people to realize that

Something new happened in this movement, with one hand, people were throwing rocks, with the other hand they were filming it with their mobile phones. For the first time ordinary people realized how they could be part of the news²¹ (Vucht van, 2012).

Videos of the shootings filmed on citizens' mobile phones were widely circulated on the Internet and social media; this undermined the attempts of the KDP and the PUK to control media to misguide their audience about what was really occurred (Jamal, 2011). With this respect, Sherko Mustafa remarked that 'social media astonished everyone, because it was impossible for audiences to catch all information and news spread by the online platforms, as the events developed very rapidly' (Mustafa, 2015). Similarly, Rebwar Ali noted that the mainstream media used Facebook videos as sources because they were unable to catch and cover the entire movement (Ali, 2015)

The importance of citizen journalism is not limited to documenting and spreading news to a broader audience. Social media can frame the expression of beliefs rather than simply expressing certain kinds of political action. Social media not only provide grounds for anti-regime views but also enhance the expression and development of a range of attitudes and pluralism in a wider sense (Shah et al, 2001; Tai, 2006;

²¹ (https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Demonstration+in+Slemani). a quick sweep of YouTube with the key words (demonstration in Slemani) will illustrate tens of video recordings on the event, and most of these recordings recorded by citizens' mobile phones and then republished and shared in Facebook accounts and YouTube. Each of these videos has thousands of viewers

Shirky, 2008). According to Barham Ahmed Salih, ‘anyone armed with social media can establish a self-media outlet. They are fundamentally empowering those who are underprivileged’ (Salih, 2015). In the Slemani movement, social media helped to amplify voices of different marginalized individuals and groups. According to Asos Hardi, it particularly provided an opportunity ‘for youths, who felt that they had been neglected, to speak up and express their ideas to other users’ (Hardi, 2015). Similarly, Haval Abubaker noted that social media

converted people from receiver of messages to creators and senders of message and allowed the appearance of an absolute liberal discourse capable of gathering and mobilizing people’ (Abubaker, 2015).

Social media enlarged the scope of freedom of expression tremendously. What users can say in social media is vastly different to traditional media in IK (Hardi, 2015; Ali, 2015). These perspectives are important for the democratization process in IK as people face constraints on freedom of expression.

On reporting news and information, during the protests, social media played a significant role in disseminating latest news and information to audiences. Even the activities and announcements of the council for the protests that supervised the movement, inside and outside Slemani were published through social media and reached other citizens in Erbil and Duhok (Fatah, 2015). Simultaneously, youths converted Facebook into a political platform. It was a conduit where news about protest

spread directly from the protest arena to other places, as activists did in the Arab Spring events (Muhamad, 2015). Additionally, Rebwar Ali²² remarked that:

Teachers used Facebook to disseminate the latest news about the protests. Our group for the first time announced on Facebook that on 20 February 2011, teachers would participate in the protests. The announcement succeeded in bringing countless number of teachers into the streets. Facebook also used to increase political awareness of protesters and citizens through publishing news about the reaction of the government against the movement (Ali, 2015).

Social media facilitate the flow of information about the movement and bring citizens to participate in dissemination of information on the movement are significant as they provided massive opportunities for citizens to participate in the movement. In the past, it was difficult for citizens to participate in the protest activities. By the virtue of social media, citizens do not need to rely on other resources to be part of popular movements and these online resources maximized participation in the protest activism.

Media coverage for social movements is generally significant and crucial in order to generate public sympathy and reach out to the internal and external environment. With the arrival of social media, the coverage of social movement activities witnessed substantial transformation (Donk et al, 2004; Lopes, 2014). In the Slemani movement, social media had a critical impact on the protests and gaining popularity. Generally, IK lacks a nationalized media as the majority of the media outlets

²² led Facebook group called (Campaign for Defending Teachers Rights).

are politicized. Consequently, political party media represent the interests and political ideology of the owner. Additionally, the media have legal and social responsibilities; contents are subject to filtering and modification to be legally acceptable and appropriate for public consumption (Abubaker, 2015); social media transport information directly without a mediator. In social media, there is no filtration and modification of contents and they can be designed in a more provocative style, to trigger hatred and outrage, and to influence the audience's feelings (Saravan, 2015; Ali, 2015). Social media allowed the protesters in Slemani to bypass the constraints of politicized media. According to Yahya N. Ali (2015)

During the protests, the necessity for social media increased rapidly, because the coverage of local traditional media was not powerful enough. Consequently, youths resorted heavily to social media, especially when they realized the power of this technology in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions (Ali, 2015).

Some activists criticized the role of the mainstream media for being politicised and blocking information. For instance, San Saravan highlighted that because 'traditional media belong to the political parties and they do not show everything' (Vucht van, 2012). Additionally, the structure of traditional media is quite different to social media platforms. Traditional media are unable to operate like social media platforms in terms of publishing news and contents. Social media are always quicker than traditional media to provide the audience with news (Ali, 2015; Mustafa, 2015). Furthermore, it is extremely difficult for conventional media in IK to publicly call for

protest and demonstration. Protesters were unable to rely on political party media, even opposition parties, to publicize their protest. According to Rebin Hardi,

The opposition media outlets did not join the protesters with all their powers. We did not see any formal call for protesting or informing citizens about schedules or activities of protests in their media (Hardi, 2015).

The KDP and the PUK designed strategies to censor information and prevent citizens from receiving latest news about the movement. In the first step, they attacked independent and the opposition media alike. For example, on 20 February 2011, PUK agents in Slemani burned the NRT Media Network's office, which was allegedly the only independent media outlet. NRT played an important role in providing live coverage of the shooting incidents in front of the KDP office (Mustafa, 2015; Hardi, 2015). According to Shaswar Qadir,²³ after the channel's office was burned, he 'received threats from the PUK officials who said; yesterday we burned NRT, today we will burn you. The PUK wanted to hide the truth. They will do everything to keep their system safe' (Hlidkova, 2011). The KDP agents attacked Goran's media and threatened Speda and Payam TVs by surrounding their offices in Erbil (Hlidkova, 2011; Human Rights Watch (b), 2011; Abubaker, 2015). The KDP and the PUK attacks on media come from the popularity of these channels as vital sources for news (Hardi, 2015).

However, these strategies were unsuccessful because the opposition media in Slemani continued broadcasting news. The opposition and international media²⁴ disseminated news about the movement and amplified its picture. They rebroadcasted

²³ Shaswar Qadeir is the NRT owner and cofounder

²⁴ Opposition Media (Speda, KNN, and Payam Satellite), International Media (CNN, BBC, and Aljazeera)

YouTube and Facebook videos in their news bulletin. In this sense, social media provided satellite TVs with real-time video recordings. Images and videos published by citizens in social media such as shootings, burning the tents and platforms of protesters by security members went viral across online networks. Consequently, satellite TVs maximized the viewers of the events. (Ali, 2015; Ali, 2015; Abubaker, 2015; Mustafa, 2015; Saravan, 2015). More precisely, San Saravan (2015) highlighted that by ‘using social media, protests succeeded in bringing the international media on board. These channels magnified the echo of the movement to the rest of the world and helped in breaking barriers of isolation’ (Saravan, 2015).

Mainstream media generally has some limitations and it is not appropriate for protesters to rely on them for the movements operation, as citizens have limited chances to disseminate information about time, location, communication, and coordination and protest activities generally. With this respect Rebin Hardi highlighted that

The latest news about schedules, times, places, programs was not received from mainstream media, it was received from social media especially Facebook. Mainstream media are not under the control of populace and are owned by the political parties (Hardi, 2015).

Social media were important for the protesters because, they allowed users to distribute information and news, and receive feedback and comments very quickly; this information was also hosted online to allow easy reviewing. While the mainstream media is a unidirectional communication medium, social media have multi directional

communication capacity, which allows users to establish communication (Muhamad, 2015).

In IK, it is risky for mainstream media to directly express anti-government sentiments during political crises. For example, NRT Satellite TV, apparently the only independent Satellite TV in IK based in Slemani provided live coverage for the movement and promptly had its office burned by PUK assailants on the second day of the protests (Rauf, 2014; Mustafa, 2015; Saravan, 2015). The KDP and the PUK Peshmerga also surrounded the opposition media for possible attacks.

In the social media era, social movements rely on the online resources to compensate for mainstream media's lack of coverage. This reliance is important in diversifying the news and information and fostering plurality. Social media enabled protesters to organize and to mobilize their anti-government protests, communicate their message, and coordinate collective action, thereby supporting citizens' participation in influencing politics.

3.3 The Risks of Social Media to the Slemani Movement

Despite the positive impacts of social media on the Slemani movement, there are also a number of risks and drawbacks that social media have for social movements and, consequently, democratization politics. Online platforms have many risks for social movements and protests as they are subject to surveillance and censorship. Authoritarian governments use these platforms for countering democratization process, to enhance their control over power, disseminate pro-government contents and spread

propaganda, and design counter-protest strategies (Rahimi, 2011; Morozov, 2011; MacKinnon, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013).

Like many authoritarian regimes, the Kurdish authorities relied on social media to monitor activists and censor digital contents. In the Slemani movement, the PUK and the KDP party security members targeted and arrested activists and journalists who covered the protests through their personal Facebook accounts. They also arrested those who spoke at protests (Hardi, 2015). Human Rights Watch documented many of cases of harassing, threatening, arresting journalists, hacking, monitoring their personal Facebook and email accounts (Human Rights Watch (b), 2011). One journalist remarked that

Many of my Facebook friends told me that the security forces called and threatened them, saying they had better take themselves off their Facebook friend list, and many of them have done' (Human Rights Watch (b), 2011).

Additionally, social media had drawbacks for logistical and coordination aspects of the movement. When users announced on Facebook about their plan and location for their next step, it was easy for security forces to monitor and crackdown on the plan. This is because the Internet and social media platforms are open to all. In Razwan Abubaker Muhamad's (2015) experience, social media platforms allowed security forces to get to the meeting place before the activists 'as they were aware about our plans whether through their direct monitoring of Facebook or through their spies and agents who probably received the news through social media' (Muhamad, 2015).

Thus, it is clear that social media also allow security agents to collect information on individuals and violate privacy of users, then target those individuals. With this respect, Yahya N. Ali (2015) and Rebwar Ali (2015) revealed that social media created personal risks because they provided an opportunity for security agents to identify the identity and the political background of the users (Ali, 2015). Even the security forces relied extensively on those images published by the activists themselves in arresting and prosecutions (Hardi, 2015; Mustafa, 2015; Ali, 2015). To avoid this, the protesters established countless pseudonyms and fake accounts²⁵ to conceal their identities (Hardi, 2015).

Social media provided authoritarian governments with resources to launch counter-protest strategies and suppress social movements. In the Slemani movement, the party security forces benefited from social media to launch anti protest campaign. To do so, the KDP and the PUK security apparatus dedicated resources to organize counterattacks and demonize the movement. According to Yahya N. Ali,

Security forces understood the power of social media and engaged with strategizing social media to suppress the protest. During the movement, countless pages appeared in Facebook and Twitter as pro KDP and PUK pages. These pages defended both parties and attacked the protesters and opposition parties by describing them as traitors and disloyal to Kurdistan. Party security apparatus were monitoring and looking for those activists who run

²⁵ such as (Shorshi Nergiz - Jasmine revolution, Paigi Shaqam – Street Page, Paigi Shahid Rezhwan – Martyrdom Rezhwan Page)

and opened pages and they try to hack these pages (Ali, 2015).

Pro-KDP and PUK pages worked extensively to demonize the movement and presented it negatively. According to Rebwar Ali,

The pro KDP and PUK pages campaigned to portray the movement as an Islamic revolution through highlighting the picture of the Friday prayers of the protesters. These pages also highlighted some pictures e.g. protesters praying on wine cardboard boxes to show a contradictory picture about the movement, because drinking wine in Kurdish society, as part of the Muslim society, was considered unacceptable' (Ali, 2015).

Similarly, Haval Abubaker highlighted that security agents used Facebook to smear the protesters;

Some pages showed images of young teenagers, male and female, standing beside each other then pasted a sexual image with it, and wrote that the protest arena is a place for romantic dates rather than defending democracy and reform (Abubaker, 2015).

The KDP and PUK also created fake accounts in the name of the protest leaders. These accounts republished messages of the leader, but after a while, they published rumours and insults on public officials in their name. Haval Abubaker (2015) and Rebin Hardi (2015) revealed that, there were several Facebook accounts were

opened in their names that spread rumours, insulted someone and disseminated messages supportive to the KDP and PUK. They suspected that party intelligent agencies (Parastin for the KDP, and Dazgay Zanyari for the PUK), supporters and members of both parties were behind these online accounts (Abubaker, 2015; Hardi, 2015).

Another drawback is that social media may exaggerate the strength of a movement and cause false calculations. According to Rebin Hardi,

Because of social media, some of the protesters created a picture for themselves that the entire people in IK are supportive to the movement. However, in reality, not all citizens in IK supported it. There were some citizens who completely rejected the protests. When the protesters witnessed social media support and online solidarity from citizens in Erbil, they imagined that Erbil would definitely join the movement. This was a mirage and illusion. Social media created this imagination, which was unrealistic, because ultimately Erbil did not join the movement (Hardi, 2015).

From these perspectives, social media have potential risks for social movements. Although social media are positive tools for political participation, they, simultaneously, harm political participation because authoritarian governments can also use these online resources for surveillance, censorship, empowering authoritarian rule, publishing pro-government contents and spreading propaganda. In suppressing the Slemani movement,

in addition to use of force by the KDP and PUK security agents, social media platforms were used by KDP security agents to crack down on the movement and further enhance their power. Therefore, social media can be risky for social movements and their mission to achieve political change and democratic transformation.

4 Conclusion

The Slemani movement was a turning point in Kurdish politics. For the first time, citizens attempted to fight for democratic transformation in a peaceful movement. This movement was a clear indication that Kurdish people desire democracy. It was a popular movement organized by citizens rather than political parties, and it was valuable for citizens' political experience. The movement was heavily influenced by the Arab Spring uprisings.

In this movement, social media had a significant role in facilitating communication and participation. They assisted participants to construct powerful networks and advance solidarity, communication and coordination tools, gather and publish news and information, and promote citizens' journalism. These practices, fuelled by regional social movements, are important for enhancing political activism and the capacity of populace to influence domestic politics in the IK. Social media platforms, as theoretical insights suggest, are important platforms for enhancement of political participation as they open new spaces for individual's engagement in political life.

On the other hand, the KDP and the PUK realized the power of social media and consequently developed strategies to deal with the political consequences of online

platforms. Social media had negative impacts for the Slemani movement as they increased the capacities of security agents to increase surveillance, censorship, formulating counter-movement policies to suppress pro-democratic movements. The government policies on social media may discourage some citizens from engaging with social media for democratic politics for fear of risks to their personal life. In this sense, censorship and surveillance may undermine popular endeavours for democratization and political transformations in IK.

The empirical findings suggest that on micro-level, social media substantially influenced the protest organization and citizen's participation in the protest. It allowed them to easily engage with politics and attempted to utilize the online resources to influence politics in their favour. However, citizens, through using social media platforms were unable to counter the power of the KDP and the PUK or transform democratic landscape of IK for the better. Ultimately, social media became an additional resource for the KDP and the PUK to counter the movement and waves of possible changes in the Kurdish politics. Thus, the pro-democratic Kurdish digitally fuelled movement was simply suppressed by the same resources in which the movement relied on to achieve democratization. Social media do not necessarily ensure longer-term political participation and strengthen democratization because authoritarian governments can benefit from online resources for practicing surveillance, censorship, and monitoring citizens in order to suppress citizens' collective action. Additionally, repressive governments can rely on social media platforms to enhance their rule and strengthen their control of power through spreading propaganda, demonizing political participation such as protests and demonstrations; the online resources also allow the

publication of pro-government content. From this perspective, the Internet and social media have ambivalent implications for political participation and do not necessarily enhance democratization.

Chapter 5

Social Media, Political Discussion, and the Kurdish Political Parties: The Case of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU)

1 Introduction

Political discussion and interactivity between citizens and the party leaders, representatives, and the policy makers is considered a crucial condition for a genuine democratic political system. As Benjamin Barber observed, “there can be no strong democratic legitimacy without ongoing talk” (Barber, 1984: 136). A strong democracy requires productive and fruitful discussions between citizens and government officials regarding policy issues. Conducting open discussion provides citizens with the means to actively engage in politics in open, rational, and informed discussion, the major themes which have preoccupied democratic theorists since the birth of democracy (Dahl, 1989; Grigsby, 2012).

In IK, political parties and their leaders used the Internet and social media platforms to establish party websites, pages and accounts belonging to party leaders; countless pro-party pages and accounts were made by followers. Increasing the online presence of political parties and their leaders is a significant development which could have substantial implications for the nascent Kurdish democracy. This chapter addresses

how the Internet and social media contribute to generating political discussion and activity between the Kurdish citizens and political parties. It also discusses the implication of online resources for democratic discussion and democratic politics in the nascent Kurdish democracy.

This chapter explores the use of social media in relation to the concept of ‘political participation as political discussion’. Current theorizations of social media in this regard suggest that firstly, the Internet and social media are good tools to facilitate political discussion. The Internet and social media can establish two-way communication and interactivity among users. Social media provide access to information, which will lead to better-informed political discussion, active political participation and will ultimately enhance democratization. Additionally, online platforms provide open and free expression of political views, a pluralistic environment for open discussion about politics and a medium for informing citizens about politics. This chapter also argues that the Internet and social media have a limited impact on enhancing political discussion. They reinforce the current status of politics rather than enhancing democratic politics. Furthermore, they may damage democracy by simplifying political discussion and lowering the levels of rational public debate. Additionally, having access to information may not lead to active participation of citizens in politics due to lack of sufficient knowledge, skills, and interest. To support these two key arguments, this chapter studies the websites, social media pages, and accounts of two Kurdish political parties and their leaders: the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU). This is in order to assess the

degree to which these websites and online accounts promote political discussion and democratization in IK.

This chapter consists of five sections. Section two presents a brief background about both political parties. The third section describes the online background and presence of both parties. Section four compares the websites and social media accounts of both parties to assess the degree to which they facilitate political discussion. In the concluding section, the findings of this chapter will be presented with theoretical consideration. The findings suggest that the Internet and social media resources do not necessarily generate genuine democratic deliberation and effective interactivity between citizens and political parties; consequently the online interactivity does not have a powerful influence on enhancing democratization and democratic consolidation in IK.

2 A Brief Background about the PUK and the KIU

2.1 The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), or colloquially Yakeri, is a secular, social democratic, and leftist political party. It was established by some leaders who left the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in 1975, after the KDP's defeat under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani by the Iraqi regime. The founding members of the PUK included Ibrahim Ahmed, Jalal Talabani (the former president of Iraq after 2003), Nawshirwan Mustafa, Ali Askari, and Fuad Masum (the current president of Iraq, since 2014). The PUK describes itself as a social democrat party and works to rebuild and redirect Kurdish society along modern and democratic lines (BBC News, 2003; The Kurdish Project, 2015). Despite its ideological background, politically, the party's

policies are mostly compatible with the Iranian political strategy in the region, while the KDP's political vision is closer to Turkey's (Mills, 2016). Since its establishment, the party was led by Jalal Talabani until he suffered a heart attack in December 2012 (CNN, 2015). After Talabani disappeared from politics, the PUK failed to elect his replacement as the PUK secretary general.

Since its establishment in 1975, and after the 1991 Kurdish uprising against the Baathist regime, the PUK played an important role in the Kurdish liberation movement and Kurdish politics after the 1991 uprisings. In the first parliamentary election in 1992, the PUK obtained 43.61 percent of the votes and it formed the Kurdistan regional government with the KDP.

Recently, the party has faced two big challenges. In 2009, the PUK witnessed some internal political developments. The deputy of secretary general, Nawshirwan Mustafa announced his separation from the PUK and formed another political party called 'the Change Movement – Bzutnaway Goran'. This separation was detrimental to the party: the party's seats in the 2013 Kurdistan parliamentary elections reduced to 18 seats and Change movement gained 24 seats. The majority of Goran's seats were believed have been previously PUK seats (The Kurdish Project, 2015). In the formation of the KRG eighth cabinet, the PUK lost some important ministries to the Goran bloc in parliament, including the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Peshmerga. However, the PUK kept its de facto dominance over its Peshmerga, security forces, and other administrative positions in Slemani province.

The second change is the aforementioned loss of Jalal Talabani, the former Iraqi president and General Secretary of the party. This has also reflected sharply on the PUK

leadership. It resulted in the emergence of internal problems for the party and disagreement among its leaders. This demonstrates the lack of institutionalization of the party and its reliance on one personality. IK's citizens have benefited from social media by publicly speaking about the party's crisis; a lot of top-secret information about the party has been leaked to social media accounts.

The PUK's headquarter is based in Slemani, and it has branches and centres in Erbil and Duhok. The party's membership distribution is mainly in Slemani, although it has members and supporters in other cities.

2.1.1 The Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU)

Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), colloquially referred to as Yekgirtu, defined itself in the party's 2012 internal manifesto as 'a patriotic and reformist party that strives for a developed society and establish a rightful authority in the Kurdistan region' (Kurdistan Islamic Union, 2012). The party considers the principles and values of the Islamic religion and authentic human values as references of its political action. They recognize the social, cultural, and political rights of non-Muslim minorities, and denounce religious, political, cultural, and social-based discrimination (*Kurdistan Islamic Union*, 2012). The KIU established on February 6, 1994 and did not participate in the on-going civil war at that time. This party was in opposition during the period 2009-2013 and after the 2013 election it entered a coalition with other parties to form the eighth KRG cabinet.

It is believed that the KIU has connections with the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan Al-Muslimin) in Egypt; some leaders deny this whilst some acknowledge this. Hiwa Mirza Sabir, stated that 'KIU is an extension of the school of the Muslim

Brotherhood. It inspired most of the ideas on which the Kurdistan Islamic Union builds itself” (Rudaw, 2014). However, according to Mohammad Rauf, the chief of the KIU leadership council, ‘we do not have any organizational links with them, and we are a Kurdish party’ (Rudaw, 2014). Thus, it can be concluded that the KIU ideologically benefited tremendously from the Muslim Brotherhood’s political intellectual school, but KIU is not part of the Muslim Brotherhood’s organizational structure, nor is it an international branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The KIU’s headquarters are based in Erbil, capital of the Kurdistan Region (offices of Secretary General - Amindari Gshti - Council of Leadership, and Politburo). The party also has branches in all other governorates and districts. The party’s popularity or membership is nearly distributed equally throughout IK (Rauf, 2015). This could be recorded as a strong point for the party, because other political parties in IK, such as the KDP and PUK, do not have the same distribution of popularity and membership across IK.

Since its establishment in 1994, the KIU have engaged in peaceful political action and have actively participated in the Kurdistan Region’s politics, including parliamentary elections, provisional council elections, and the Iraqi parliamentary election. In the 2013 parliamentary election, the party received 10 seats in the Kurdistan parliament and formed part of the eighth KRG cabinet by receiving three ministries: ministry of social affairs, ministry of electricity, and ministry of parliamentary affairs. They also gained two directorates: the directorate of NGOs and directorate of disputed areas (Mohammad, 2014). The party played an important role in the Kurdish political process due to ‘the general perception that the KIU neither corrupt nor militarily

threatening, particularly since they do not control oil revenues or have their own militias' (Natali, 2014).

Despite their peaceful political approach and distancing from being armed, they received backlash against their political action by nationalist political parties, especially the KDP. In the 2005 Iraqi and Kurdistan parliamentary elections, KIU's offices in the Duhok governorate were attacked and burned down by the KDP members and supporters: four members of KIU were killed including two high ranking leaders (Finer, 2005). Jaafer Eminky, a member of KDP politburo confessed in a Kurdish talk show that the KDP supporters burned down the KIU offices in Duhok in 2005, but the KDP reimbursed the KIU and the family of leaders who were killed (Eminky, 2015). Once more, in 2009, the KIU offices were attacked and burned down in Duhok province, where KDP has strong administrative and military presence (Natali, 2014). Surprisingly, in both cases, law and judiciary authority did not play any role in prosecuting the perpetrators of these attacks.

It is worth mentioning that the KIU is the first Kurdish political party that through a democratic process made changes to its leadership: during the party's sixth congress in 2012 the secretary general was changed. Other political parties in IK, including the KDP and the PUK, did not change its leadership since their establishment. This indicates that the KIU is the most institutionalized of Kurdish political parties and contrasts sharply to the PUK.

3 The PUK, the KIU, the Internet, Social Media, and Political discussion

3.1 The Online Background of Both Parties

3.1.1 The PUK

After its establishment in 1975, the PUK engaged in armed confrontation with the Iraqi regime led by Saddam Hussein. From its inception, the PUK used the available information technology at that time such as radio and typewriters to rally, mobilize, and recruit Kurdish citizens as fighters (Peshmerga) in the Kurdistan Mountains (Salih, 2015). At that time, it was not easy for the party to establish a television (TV) because it was prone to be targeted by the air strikes of the Iraqi army.

After the 1991 uprisings, it was easier for Kurdish political parties to use communication technologies on a wider scale. The PUK has established a specialized media communication office named Maktabi Ragayandn (the Information Office). Under this office, the party established the first local TV channel in IK (Salih, 2015). In the 1990s the party founded a newspaper: Kurdistan New (the New Kurdistan), and established several local and satellite TV channels including Kurdsat Satellite TV, Kurdsat News, and Gali Kurdistan. These party-media outlets provided different media programs, which show news, social and cultural programs, talk shows, sports, and documentaries. Through these communication channels, the party aimed to broadcast pro-secularist political discourse in Kurdish society.

With the arrival of the Internet in the IK, the PUK started to engage and integrate the Internet into its communication strategies. At present, most of the party's traditional media outlets have moved online. For example, the party has websites dedicated to its

newspapers and satellite TV channels.²⁶ Besides that, the party has two other websites, which operate as the official mouthpieces of the party.²⁷ These websites also provide online contents in several languages.

The invention of the social media, especially Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, encouraged the PUK to revise its online communication strategies, because the party, as Berham Ahmed Salih, the deputy general-secretary and former KRG prime minister, highlighted, ‘the PUK was lagging behind in terms of digital technology’ (Salih, 2015). The party now has a strong social media presence. The party’s newspaper, satellite TVs, and websites, have direct links in social networking sites and each account has thousands of likes and followers.²⁸

In addition to these online presences, PUK leaders have their own social media accounts. It is possible to identify three types of party engagement with social media and the Internet:

Level (1): 12 prominent leaders of the PUK²⁹ had individual social media accounts or pages. There are some Facebook pages in the name of Jalal Talabani, the

²⁶ (Kurdistani New – the New Kurdistan) newspaper website: <http://www.knwe.org/>

Kurdsat News Satellite TV website: <http://www.kurdsatnews.com/>

Gali Kurdistan Satellite website: <http://www.gksat.tv/>

²⁷ PUK online website: <http://www.pukonline.com/> and PUK Media website: <http://www.pukmedia.com/>

²⁸ Kurdistan Nwe Newspaper in Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/Kurdistani-Nwe-209026845834974/?fref=ts>), Kurdsat News in Facebook:

(<https://www.facebook.com/kurdsatnews/>), Twitter: (<https://twitter.com/KurdsatNews?lang=en>),

Youtube: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F14vtOPp4pA>). Kurdsat Broadcast Corporation in

Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/Kurdsat/?fref=ts>), Twitter:

(<https://twitter.com/Kurdsat?lang=en>), YouTube: (<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheKurdsat>), Gali

Kurdistan Satellite TV in Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Gali-Kurdistan/104036909632178?fref=ts>), YouTube:

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niEvK5MVmkE>). PUK online website in Facebook:

(<https://www.facebook.com/PukOnline/?fref=ts>), Twitter: (<https://twitter.com/PUKonline?lang=en>).

PUK Media website in Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/pukmedia1975/?fref=ts>), Twitter:

(<https://twitter.com/pukmedia?lang=en>).

²⁹ Qubad Talabani, the member of PUK leadership council and deputy prime minister of KRG, Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/qubadtalabaniofficial/?fref=ts>), Twitter:

PUK secretary general, but it seems that he is not running the pages due to his ailment.³⁰

Other leaders also have Facebook and Twitter accounts.³¹

Level (2): A majority of the PUK organs, branches, and centres also have their own social media account and pages. These accounts and pages share their own activities on social media. The accounts and pages do not represent the PUK's formal position; they simply update their followers on their activity.³²

Level (3): the pro-PUK online groups are especially present on Facebook, there are countless accounts, pages, and groups established by the party members, fans, and

(<https://twitter.com/qubadjt>), YouTube:

(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcZCIml0JBx7WPqZaoLkxcA>). Mala Bakhtyar, chief of the

PUK politburo Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/Mala.Bakhtiar/?fref=ts>). Sadi Pira, PUK

member of politburo Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/Sadi-Pire-307023045162/?fref=ts>).

Azad Jundyany, PUK chief of information office, Facebook:

(<https://www.facebook.com/Azad.Jndyany/?fref=ts>), Kosrat Rasul Ali, Second PUK deputy

secretary general, Facebook: ([https://www.facebook.com/pages/Kosrat-Rasul-](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Kosrat-Rasul-Ali/112368685441396?fref=ts)

[Ali/112368685441396?fref=ts](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Kosrat-Rasul-Ali/112368685441396?fref=ts)).

³⁰ Jalal Talabani Facebook pages: (<https://www.facebook.com/mam.jalal2011/?fref=ts>),

(<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jalal-Talabani/108370732520502?fref=ts>)

³¹ Qubad Talabani, the PUK member of leadership council and deputy Prime Minister of KRG;

Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/qubadtalabaniofficial/?fref=ts>), Twitter:

(<https://twitter.com/qubadjt?lang=en>). YouTube:

(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcZCIml0JBx7WPqZaoLkxcA>). Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, the

PUK politburo member; Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/Hero.ibrahimA/?fref=ts>). Barham

Ahmed Salih, the PUK deputy secretary – general; Facebook: ([https://www.facebook.com/Barham-](https://www.facebook.com/Barham-Salih-112851263139/?fref=ts)

[Salih-112851263139/?fref=ts](https://www.facebook.com/Barham-Salih-112851263139/?fref=ts)), Twitter: (<https://twitter.com/BarhamSalih?lang=en>). Kosrat Rasul

Ali, the second deputy of the PUK Secretary-General, Facebook:

(<https://www.facebook.com/Kosrat.rasul/?fref=ts>), Twitter: (<https://twitter.com/Kosrat?lang=en>),

Sadi Pira, Member of the PUK politburo, Facebook: ([https://www.facebook.com/Sadi-Pire-](https://www.facebook.com/Sadi-Pire-307023045162/?fref=ts)

[307023045162/?fref=ts](https://www.facebook.com/Sadi-Pire-307023045162/?fref=ts)). Mala Bakhtyar, spokesman of the PUK politburo. Facebook:

(<https://www.facebook.com/Mala.Bakhtiar/?fref=ts>). Hakim Qadir, Member of the PUK politburo,

Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/hakim.qadir.hamajan/?fref=ts>). Adel Murad, Member of the

PUK central council, Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/AdelMuradOfficial/?fref=ts>). Fuad

Masum, Member of the PUK politburo and President of the republic of Iraq, Facebook:

(<https://www.facebook.com/PresidentMasum/?fref=ts>), Twitter:

(https://twitter.com/Dr_Fuad_Masum?lang=en). Arez Abdullah, Head of the PUK bloc in Iraqi

parliament, Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/Arez.Abdullah.Official/?fref=ts>). Adnan Mufti,

Member of the PUK central council, Facebook: ([https://www.facebook.com/Adnan-Mufti-](https://www.facebook.com/Adnan-Mufti-598276936912766/?fref=ts)

[598276936912766/?fref=ts](https://www.facebook.com/Adnan-Mufti-598276936912766/?fref=ts)), Twitter: (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlMufti?lang=en>). Fared Asasard,

Member of the PUK central council, Facebook:

(<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010210380476&fref=ts>).

³² PUK Koya center (14), Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi14koya/?fref=ts>).

Leadership council of PUK: (https://www.facebook.com/pukpbYNK/?fref=ts&oref=br_tf). Central

council of PUK: (<https://www.facebook.com/AnjumaniNawandPukcc/?fref=ts>). PUK politburo –

Erbil: (<https://www.facebook.com/MktbySyasyYktyNyshtmanyKwrdstanHwlr/?fref=ts>).

probably the PUK security intelligence (Dazgay Zanyari). These online groups engage with different activities; they primarily support and defend the PUK policies, enhance the PUKs political image, republish the online content of the PUK prominent leaders, and engage in competition with other online groups from other political parties.³³ The PUK media outlets connect its online contents with these accounts.

3.1.2 The KIU

It is possible to claim that the KIU's political operation in the Kurdish political arena started with the adoption of information and communication technologies available at that time. Since its establishment in 1994, the KIU began to communicate with the Kurdish citizens to share its message and political perspectives. The party created a specialized office known as Maktabi Ragayandn (the Information Office) (Kurdistan Islamic Union, 2012). Through this office, the party adopted a variety of communication technologies to establish communications with society. The party began publishing a newspaper: Rozhnamay Yekgirtu (Yekgirtu Newspaper), which acted as

³³ PUK: (<https://www.facebook.com/PUKofficial.org/?fref=ts>). PUK online: (<https://www.facebook.com/PukOnline/?fref=ts>). Slemani Qalay Sawz – Sulaymanyiah a green fort: (<https://www.facebook.com/akar.sawz?pnref=story>). Yakeri Nishtimani – union patriotic: (<https://www.facebook.com/Yakeri-Nishtimani-124065621113629/?fref=ts>). Ganjani Yakeri – PUK youths: (<https://www.facebook.com/yakeri/?fref=ts>). Bas Yakeri Bas – Only PUK: (<https://www.facebook.com/soranpirababy1/?fref=ts>). Kcha Sawzaka – the Green Girl, Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/676324522405539/?fref=nf>). Yakeri Ayindaya – PUK is future: (<https://www.facebook.com/YakeriAyindaya/?fref=ts>). Mn yaketim Khwenm Sawza – I am puk and blood is green: (<https://www.facebook.com/yaketim/?fref=ts>). Yakeri Khabati Sakht – PUK and difficult strive: (<https://www.facebook.com/YktyWKhabatySkht/?fref=ts>). Yakeri Mardayati – PUK and Braveness: (<https://www.facebook.com/mamekurdd/?fref=ts>). Layangranu Hawadarani Yakeri la Facebook – PUK fans and supporters in Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/p.u.k.talabani/?fref=ts>). Mn PUKim – I am PUK: (<https://www.facebook.com/mn.Yakitym/?fref=ts>). Dwangay PUK – the PUK platform: (<https://www.facebook.com/541331179357680/?fref=ts>). Ganjanu Lawani PUK – PUK youths and adults: (<https://www.facebook.com/ganjani.yakeri/?fref=ts>). Peshmarga derinakani PUK – Old PUK meshmarga: (<https://www.facebook.com/peshmarga.derin/?fref=ts>). Gardaluli Sawz – the Green Storm: (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010434760585&fref=ts>). Ganjani PUK – the PUK youths: (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100008538273918&fref=ts>).

the official mouthpiece of the party. Additionally, the party established local TV and radio channels in all three provinces and districts of Erbil, Slemani, and Duhok. Recently, the party opened a satellite channel known as Speda Channel.³⁴ This satellite channel broadcasts different programs such as political talk shows, 24-hour news, news analysis, family programs and drama, religious shows, cultural and educational programs, economics programs, and reporting and covering the party's political activities (Speda Channel, 2015). According to Mohammad Rauf, the KIU chief of the leadership council, media tools are essential to establishing communications with society, thus, the KIU 'opened 13 local TVs, and 14 radio stations. These platforms were the prime ways of communication with the Kurdish citizens and have had direct contact with them' (Rauf, 2015). Through all these channels, the party created a political discourse empowered by a modern understanding of the basic principles of Islam.

With the arrival of the Internet in IK in the 1990s, the majority of political parties in IK were interested in establishing online communications. In 1999, the KIU opened its first website known as Kurdiu³⁵ which offers online contents in five languages. These online multi-language contents cover the political, social, cultural, economic sectors, publish the official political perspectives and positions of the party, and are regularly updated with the latest news on political developments in IK, Iraq and the Middle East (Kurdiu, 2015). Additionally, the KIU's satellite channel (Speda Channel) also has its own website, linking its live broadcast with the Internet.

³⁴ Speda Channel (<http://www.speda-tv.net/>)

³⁵ Kurdistan Islamic Union website (<http://www.kurdiu.org/>)

The advent of social media applications enabled the Kurdish political parties to interact with these social networking sites differently. The KIU does not have an official Facebook page or Twitter account. These facts been confirmed by the party leaders who were interviewed for this study. However, it does not mean that the KIU has no connections with social media. Instead, like the PUK, the KIU social media presence can be divided into several categories:

Level (1): accounts and pages owned by high-ranking political leaders of the party: the Secretary General of the party (Mohammed Faraj) has an official Facebook page³⁶ linked with the party website (Kurdiu). In addition to the KIU Secretary General, the majority of the KIU leaders have their own Facebook pages.³⁷

Level (2): The party's organs, local offices, branches and institutions; on this level, party institutions, branches, and centres opened separate accounts from those of the party leaders to publicize their activities in the areas in which they operate.³⁸ These

³⁶ Mohammed Faraj, KIU Secretary General (<https://www.facebook.com/m.farahahmad/?fref=ts>)

³⁷ For example, Mohammad Rauf Mohammad, speaker of KIU leadership council (<https://www.facebook.com/mohammad.raoof.3?fref=ts>), Hiwa Mirza Sabir, Spokesman of KIU Politburo (<https://www.facebook.com/hiwamirza.sabir?fref=ts>), Saeed Ali Abo, the KIU Secretary General assistant for KIU internal affairs (<https://www.facebook.com/SeidEli.Ebo?fref=ts>), Nohammed Ahmed, the KIU Secretary General assistant for Government and parliament affairs (<https://www.facebook.com/MuhammedZerony?fref=ts>), Khalil Ibrahim, member of the KIU politburo (<https://www.facebook.com/khalil.badini?fref=ts>), Abubaker Ali Karwany, member of the KIU politburo (<https://www.facebook.com/Abubakr-Ali-Abubakr-Karwani-152421998162279/?fref=ts>), Sherwan Shamirani, member of KIU leadership council (<https://www.facebook.com/-708121349313361/?fref=ts>), Muthanna Amin, member of KIU leadership council (<https://www.facebook.com/Dr.Muthanna.Amin/?fref=ts>), Mohammad Hawdiani, member of KIU leadership council and minister of Social affairs – KRG (<https://www.facebook.com/mohamed9hawdyani/?fref=ts>), Omer Abdul Aziz, former member of KIU leadership Council (<https://www.facebook.com/145931072179944/?fref=ts>), Bayan Nuri, Member of KIU leadership council (<https://www.facebook.com/bayan.tofiq.5?fref=ts>), Hasan Shamerani, chief of KIU monitoring and follow up office (<https://www.facebook.com/HasanShamerani/posts/766936090078975?fref=fn&pnref=story>), Muthanna Amin, member of the leadership council: (<https://www.facebook.com/Dr.Muthanna.Amin/?fref=ts>).

³⁸ For example, KIU Sulaymanyia center (<https://www.facebook.com/malbandislemayn.yakgrtu?fref=ts>), KIU Erbil Centre

accounts and pages do not formally represent the KIU, but they represent their centres and branches and operate as their mouthpieces.

Level (3): informal groups and individuals related to the party; on social media, there are many informal online groups orchestrated by the party members, individuals and supporters. The majority of these informal accounts and pages were established and administered by youth groups inside and outside the party. These unofficial pages engage with several pro-KIU activities including reposting the message of the KIU Secretary General and online activities of the high leaders of the party, support and advocacy of the party's policies and political position and, sometimes, criticism of their political party for the KIUs political performance in the political climate of IK.³⁹

(<https://www.facebook.com/malbandedu.hawler>), KIU Halabja Center
(<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi.peni?fref=ts>), KIU Garman Center
(<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi4/?fref=ts>), KIU Chamchamal Center
(<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010059787333&fref=ts>), KIU Mosul center
(<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi.hasht?fref=ts>), KIU 14 center
(<https://www.facebook.com/320941634783092/?fref=ts>), KIU Kalakchy Branch
(<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010934496229&fref=ts>),

³⁹ For example, I am Erbil - KIU and I am transparent
(<https://www.facebook.com/yekgrtoihawlerm.shafafm/?fref=ts>), Kurdistan Islamic Union
(<https://www.facebook.com/Kurdistan.Islamic.Union?fref=ts>), Youth of KIU
(<https://www.facebook.com/lawany.yakgrtuy.islamy/?fref=ts>), A New KIU
(<https://www.facebook.com/kiu94/?fref=ts>), KIU is our crown
(<https://www.facebook.com/yakgrtw.dllmana?fref=ts>), we are KIU and we succeed
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/712032122191101/>), KIU closed Group
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/yakgrtu.ayndaya/>), we are KIU
(<https://www.facebook.com/emayekgrtwin/?fref=ts>), KIU youths
(<https://www.facebook.com/yakgrtu.hiwawainda?fref=ts>), KIU youth in Chamchamal
(https://www.facebook.com/groups/311617085566294/?ref=br_tf), KIU youths in Sulaymaniyah
(<https://www.facebook.com/?fref=ts>), KIU youths in Garman
(<https://www.facebook.com/garmianyagrtw?fref=ts>), KIU youths leadership
(<https://www.facebook.com/balesan.sane?fref=ts>), Brave KIU youths
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/211243912317060/>), Insurgents
(<https://www.facebook.com/nawakiu/?fref=ts>), Shaqam 'Street'
(<https://www.facebook.com/Shaqam0/?fref=ts>), Chalakwanani Yakgrtw la Facebook (KIU activists in Facebook) (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/301133600052448/>)

3.2 The Internet, Social Media, and Political Discussion: the PUK and the KIU in Comparative Perspective

A key aspect of democracy is the citizens' ability to engage with politicians, political representatives and policy makers to discuss policy issues. One encouragement for participation is the citizens' need for sufficient information and knowledge in order to make an informed decision or make suggestions and propositions for party leaders, representatives, and government officials (Dahl, 1989). With the advancement of social networking sites, the status of online interactivity between individuals, institutions and politicians has transformation tremendously. The interactivity is the prominent issue enhanced and empowered with the Internet and social media in our contemporary era (Speakman, 2015). In the new digital age, it is possible to have a new style of the citizens' engagement with politics in contemporary societies. The use of interactive features online has transformed political involvement and created implications for democratic politics (Xenos, 2008; Flanagan and Metzger, 2008; Westerman et al, 2014).

For political parties, policy makers, and citizens in IK, social media promise a new era in political discussion and generating new tools to yield citizens interactivity with the party leaders and government officials. It is possible to assess the impact of the party's online resources on political discussion and democratization politics on three main levels:

3.2.1 Party Websites

The majority of political parties in IK have websites, which are part of their communication strategies with citizens. The PUK and the KIU have more than one

website⁴⁰ which have several functions. The websites of both parties act as official mouthpieces, and are used to publish different sorts of information about activities of party leaders, their parliamentary bloc and ministers in the KRG cabinet, in addition to information on economic, social, educational, regional and international issues. These websites are managed and supervised directly by both parties' media offices. The websites also have links to social networking sites connecting the online contents with them. In this way, the social media users receive a wide range of information from the party news agencies.

From examining PUK and KIU websites, it is possible to assess the websites' contribution to generating political discussion. It is noticeable both parties' websites contain a huge amount of information. For example, the Kurdiu website, as Mohammad Rauf⁴¹ and Hiwa Mirza Sabir⁴² explain, is composed of several informative parts. The first part publishes data about the party, the leadership council's political positions, formal statements from party representatives, information on the party's participation in parliament and government, the activities of the party's parliamentary bloc and ministers, the opinions of the party and party leaders about Iraqi Kurdistan's political issues, and general news on Iraqi Kurdistan, Iraq, and the Middle East (Rauf, 2015; Sabir, 2015). However, information on party websites has limited success in establishing political discussion. The information on the website is mainly the same information broadcasted and disseminated from the parties'

⁴⁰ PUK Online: <http://www.pukonline.com/kurdish.aspx>, PUK Media: <http://www.pukmedia.com/>, Kurdsat Media Corporation: <http://www.kurdsat.tv/>, Kurdsat News: <http://www.kurdsatnews.com/>. The KIU websites: The Kurdiu website (www.kurdiu.org), and Speda TV website (<http://www.speda-tv.net/>)

⁴¹ Leader and Chief of KIU leadership council

⁴² Leader and Spokesman of the KIU politburo

traditional media outlets. Therefore, political parties are occupying the online domain by disseminating old contents across websites and networks: their use of the Internet to promote their party is not innovative. Furthermore, both parties appear to have more control over the websites' content than citizens, and the majority of the websites' content support the parties' vision and political strategy. An observer seldom finds articles and columns that are critical of the party's strategy and leaders' performance. However, this does not mean that other leaders and social media users do not criticise the PUK and its leaders. For example, on December 15, 2017, Farsat Sofi, the KDP parliamentarian harshly criticised PUK leaders on October 16, 2017, accusing them of treason when the PUK Peshmarga withdrew from Kirkuk city and left it for the Iraqi army and Popular Mobilization Units (PMU)^{43 44}. Using websites in this manner and with this inflammatory language seem to be not supportive of political discussion and democratisation.

Another issue is related to the design and structure of websites of both parties: they are unsupportive for establishing political discussion. Although PUK and KIU's websites allow users to write opinions, columns and blogs, in order to 'be creative by opening the space to represent diversified perspectives' (Rauf, 2015), there is no evidence to show that party leaders listen to views and opinion expressed through website blogs. There is no clear evidence suggesting that the blogs and writings of users have any substantial effects on the policy outcomes, or whether policy makers and party leaders actually read the citizens' input and consider them for policy making.

⁴³ Farsat Sofi account
(https://www.facebook.com/hevar.gazna?hc_ref=ARSltn0yAk8niORtyUFUN4jwjJr4y5K3Phi_tNQknTFJUCCt2FRpXO_uqhAnKRisFss&fref=nf)

⁴⁴ PMUs are Iraqi militias and supported by Iran

Additionally, there is no forum on either parties' website for citizens and online users to discuss political party programs, policies, plans, law drafts and proposals, or citizens' own ideas. The same observation can be recorded on the PUK and the KIU websites. Ultimately, the party's website plays a very limited role in generating democratic political discussion because they do not transport citizens' views and opinions to the party leaders or policy makers. In IK, the democratic role of the party websites is still in infant stage and the Kurdish political party websites have a minimal role in enhancing political discussion. The party websites are essentially a vehicle for publishing propaganda. Generally speaking, political parties integrate websites in already established communicative and political practice and they do not explore the full potential of the Internet and online resources, especially in terms of political discussion and interactivity.

3.2.2 Party Leaders' Pages and Accounts

Alongside the party's websites, majority of the party leaders in both parties have personal pages and accounts on social media, particularly Facebook.⁴⁵ The party leaders use their own social networking accounts to establish direct political communication with the Kurdish online users. They use the online tools to publishing their own information and news. For instance, Mohammad Faraj⁴⁶ regularly posts information in

⁴⁵ For Example: the PUK leaders, Barham Ahmed Salih, (<https://www.facebook.com/Barham-Salih-112851263139/?fref=ts>) Twitter account: (<https://twitter.com/BarhamSalih>) Sadi Ahmed Pira (<https://www.facebook.com/Sadi-Pire-307023045162/?fref=ts>) Kosrat Rasul Ali, (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Kosrat-Rasul-Ali/112368685441396?fref=ts>) Adnan Mufti, (<https://www.facebook.com/Adnan-Mufti-598276936912766/?fref=ts>).

The KIU leaders, Mohammad Faraj (<https://www.facebook.com/m.farajahmad/?fref=ts>) Abubakr Karwani (<https://www.facebook.com/Abubakr-Ali-Abubakr-Karwani-152421998162279/?fref=ts>) Abubakr Haladni (<https://www.facebook.com/Abubakr-Haladni-392936154216756/?fref=ts>) Salahaddin Babakir (<https://www.facebook.com/Salahaddin-Babakir-457228687637746/?fref=ts>)

⁴⁶ The KIU secretary general (<https://www.facebook.com/m.farajahmad/?fref=ts>)

his Facebook page about his activities, such as meetings with other party leaders, meetings with delegations of other political parties, welcoming foreign consulates and embassies, special envoys of international non-government agencies, for communicating political messages to party members and Kurdish citizens, and reposting interviews and statements. Other PUK and KIU leaders use social media as a key source for self-promotion, and for publishing information and online reports on their personal activities including political statements, interviews with media, party meetings, and explaining personal or the party's specific political positions. For instance, Adnan Mufti, the PUK leader, stated that he publishes 'information relevant to the PUK, the PUK's policies, activities, and meetings covered by the PUK media outlets, formal positions of the PUK on daily political developments, and sometimes respond to any accusations launched against the party' (Mufti, 2015). Similarly, Hiwa Mirza Sabir stated that Facebook 'is important in reaching out the party's voice, ideas, perceptions, and perspectives to our members, supporters, political, and intellectual figures inside and outside the Kurdistan region in the fastest way' (Sabir, 2015). Abubaker Karwani, a member of the KIU Politburo, sees Facebook as 'a tool that can be used to communicate with citizens' (Karwani, 2015).

Despite similarities, there are some fundamental differences between party leaders' use of social media. PUK leaders abstain from publishing sensitive information online, especially about financial and corruption issues, and government affairs. This may be related to the fact that before the reunification of the KRG in 2005, the PUK held an independent government in Slemani, called 'the PUK Zone' and is also currently in government. Therefore, it is unexpected that a political party leader would

publish information on their party and ruin its reputation. However, some KIU leaders including Abubakir Haladni⁴⁷ and Sherko Jawdat⁴⁸ publish detailed information about corruption over the oil contracts and in other governance sectors. Other leaders' use their social media platforms as tools to spread their personal and political opinions about political issues in IK. Barham Ahmed Salih, the former KRG Prime Minister and PUK's Deputy secretary-general, stated that he speaks 'about the issues relevant to the citizens' life and aim to have a permanent connection with them and specifically speaks about the internal circumstances of IK' (Salih, 2015). Similarly, Abubakir Karwani uses Facebook to discuss intellectual topics as an Islamic scholar, as well as his 'personal political opinions, political analysis and debate about daily political issues in IK' (Karwani, 2015).

Additionally, Arez Abdullah, a PUK leader, stated that he uses Facebook to publish 'personal views, perspectives, news, and events of individual leaders. It is the most powerful and influential tool in carrying news, messages and information from political parties and individual leaders to the public' (Abdullah, 2015).

The online resources provided new opportunities for party leaders to learn about public opinion more effectively. According to Hiwa Mirza Sabir,

Through social networking sites we are able to see how our members and citizens think about the KIU, assess and evaluate the KIU movement in the Kurdish political climate and how citizen perceive us. We have benefited

⁴⁷ Head of the KIU bloc in the Kurdistan parliament
(<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100008494143652&fref=ts>)

⁴⁸ KIU parliamentarian and head of natural resources committee in the Kurdistan parliament
(<https://www.facebook.com/sherko.jawdat.mustafa/?fref=ts>)

tremendously from critiques and suggestions flowing from these online channels. We frequently receive propositions and suggestions from our members and ordinary citizens about the political performance of the KIU parliament members, ministers in the KRG cabinet, and our political leaders (Sabir, 2015).

The online accounts and pages of party leaders have positive and negative implications for political discussion in IK. The data and statements of party leaders indicate that social media allow the appearance of different versions of information flowing from the party leaders. Before that, political leaders did not have self-generated tools like social networking sites to present their views and perspectives. They were only able to do that through political party media outlets. Now, that ability is maximized as the party leaders can easily and quickly communicate what they want. This can allow party leaders to influence the agenda setting of the media and to reshape public opinion. This is important in IK because political parties who rarely allow different perspectives to appear on party media dominate the IK's media. Thus, social media are empowering the individual leaders of political parties because individual leaders can independently disseminate information, in addition to their own messages and political perspectives to citizens without relying on the party's media outlets. However, this may lead to the increased popularity of a single leader rather than the party itself. It could also lead to diversification of political views and ultimately increase the citizen's exposure to diversified political perspectives and increase citizens' political socialization. From this perspective, social media are positive forces as they may raise political awareness and

socialization trends of the public. Social media also increase party leaders' ability to influence the public political discourse, and educate citizens about different political issues. An online statement from a political leader or dissemination of information may inspire either public support or outrage in the online domain, attracting the public's attention to specific political issues. However, in IK currently, the online information of party leaders does not result in mobilizing citizens to press the government to change its behaviour and policies.

It is noticeable that the online accounts and pages of party leaders are more effective in attracting citizens to follow political parties than party website. For example, the KIU leaders such as Mohammad Faraj,⁴⁹ Abubakr Karwani,⁵⁰ Abubakr Haladni,⁵¹ and Salahaddin Babakir⁵² have more followers than the party website. The same observation is true for the PUK; individual leaders have more followers than the party websites. This means that citizens may prefer following individual leaders rather than the party. This is probably due to individual leaders being more likely to address the grievances and preferences of citizens in their Facebook postings or they project an attractive political brand that motivates citizens to follow them online.

It is noticeable that the online accounts and pages of party leaders more effectively attract citizens to follow political parties than the party website. For example, the KIU leaders such as Mohammad Faraj,⁵³ Abubakr Karwani,⁵⁴ Abubakr

⁴⁹ Mohammad Faraj (<https://www.facebook.com/m.farahmad/?fref=ts>)

⁵⁰ Abubakr Karwani (<https://www.facebook.com/Abubakr-Ali-Abubakr-Karwani-152421998162279/?fref=ts>)

⁵¹ Abubakr Haladni (<https://www.facebook.com/Abubakr-Haladni-392936154216756/?fref=ts>)

⁵² Salahaddin Babakir (<https://www.facebook.com/Salahaddin-Babakir-457228687637746/?fref=ts>)

⁵³ Mohammad Faraj (<https://www.facebook.com/m.farahmad/?fref=ts>)

⁵⁴ Abubakr Karwani (<https://www.facebook.com/Abubakr-Ali-Abubakr-Karwani-152421998162279/?fref=ts>)

Haladni,⁵⁵ and Salahaddin Babakir⁵⁶ have more followers than the party website. The same observation is true for the PUK; individual leaders have more followers than the party websites. This means that citizens may prefer following individual leaders rather than the party. This is probably due to individual leaders being more likely to address the grievances and preferences of citizens in their Facebook postings or they project an attractive political brand that motivates citizens to follow them online.

Moreover, social media are important for citizens to address and report daily problems, their feelings on politics and what the political parties should be doing. In the case of the PUK and KIU, social media can carry citizens' sufferings to the party leaders and officials in the KRG. Citizens also can express how they feel about the political climate, what is positive and negative, and how political parties should deal with the political problems in Kurdish society. Citizens, especially those who are politically interested, can have broader access to what the party is doing. Social media platforms expand the channels for citizens' political participation and can provide a fresh and different version of political views and opinion. Barham Salih highlighted that 'it is important not only for politicians to establish communication with the public, but to understand the public's perspective and see what public opinion says' (Salih, 2015).

Although flow of information on the Internet and social media is significant for democratic politics in IK, the quality of information is problematic. The information provided by the party leaders is often about their personal activities and political views, rather than a discussion of laws, public policies, and government plans and decisions that may affect citizens more broadly. Hence, such information may not be relevant

⁵⁵ Abubakr Haladni (<https://www.facebook.com/Abubakr-Haladny-392936154216756/?fref=ts>)

⁵⁶ Salahaddin Babakir (<https://www.facebook.com/Salahaddin-Babakir-457228687637746/?fref=ts>)

enough for citizens' daily lives and needs in order to encourage the public to engage with party leaders. Therefore, social media does not always encourage productive discussions between the public and policy makers or further democratize citizens-politician relations.

Another issue that can be noticed from leaders' statements is that although that social media offers two-way communications among users, party leaders mostly use the Internet and social media in a unidirectional way. They rarely engage in democratic debate with citizens. For example, the KIU secretary general's Facebook page and those of prominent PUK leaders contain no evidence of conversation with citizens in which they explain policy positions or provide information about laws, party policies and strategies, or government policies. The online accounts of the PUK leaders also do not contain valuable information on policy issues pertinent to the life and interests of the public. There are several reasons for this; first, the party leaders mostly see the online tools as extra resources for self-promotion and personal gains e.g. promoting the political brand of the leader, reporting personal activities, presenting political opinions and general statements and messages. They seldom publish information about the reasons behind a specific government decision and policies. The party leaders also do not post questions about policy issues and do not invite users to have a rational, informed debate about them. According to Mohammad Rauf,

Politicians in IK do not present a deep and clear analysis
of political, social and economic problems in social media.
They use social media for manipulation and buying time
(Rauf, 2015).

Despite online tools enabling citizens' participation, interactivity, and empowerment, online participation and empowerment seems to have a weak impact on politicians and political parties' behaviour, and the KRG's policy formation. Both the PUK and the KIU remain passive or less responsive to citizens' demands expressed online. Recently, the KRG was found to be not providing essential services such as monthly salaries to government civil servants (Rudaw, 2015); some prominent bloggers and online public opinions demanded the KIU and the PUK withdraw from the KRG cabinet: neither party addressed the issue or made any decision to do so.⁵⁷ Similarly an anonymous webpage exposed a document containing the name of 404 female PUK members and cadres who had retired and registered on the pension payroll illegally.⁵⁸ The document was labelled as 'the 404 women officers list' and was widely circulated across the social media networks of individuals and PUK rivals. This was embarrassing for the PUK, because the party leaders had declared their support for fighting corruption on multiple occasions. However, the PUK leadership, judicial authority, and KRG officials did not take any procedures to prosecute this scandal. These examples indicate that party leaders and policy makers in IK do not take the online opinion seriously.

⁵⁷ The following links are some examples of Kurdish online users demanding the PUK and the KIU to withdraw from the KRG cabinet:
https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100002271322034&hc_ref=SEARCH&fref=nf
<https://www.facebook.com/kamalchomani/posts/10154172565829145?match=2>
<https://www.facebook.com/sdiq.mustafa/posts/865779223552500?match=2>
<https://www.facebook.com/abdulsamad.h.a/posts/1248953118454797?match=2>
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=729627703804213&set=a.206520472781608.32795.100002709706100&type=3&theater>
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1435611739789518&set=a.1240969532587074.1073741828.100000221183195&type=3&theater>
<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1362726400421821&set=a.136278159733324.20122100000534234046&type=3&theater>.

⁵⁸ KDP youths in Sulaymanyia: <https://www.facebook.com/GanjaniKDPSIemani/>, Rozhana News: <https://www.facebook.com/Rozhane.Hewal/>,

Furthermore, leaders do not use social media for political discussion in the same way as citizens. Online accounts of the PUK and KIU leaders show that few leaders interact with citizens. Even those leaders who do engage online seldom continue in their engagement for a longer period.⁵⁹ It is premature to see social media as a political forum for generating debate, exchange ideas about good governance, policy formation, and democratization of decision-making process in the Kurdish political system. Therefore, it is hard to see noticeable impact of the Internet and social media on democratising political discussion in the Kurdish context.

Although social media platforms are useful tools to increase citizens' political knowledge and socialisation, but there is no guarantee that raising political awareness and socialization may result in better engagement with political discussion and enhance democratic consolidation. This is especially true in IK, where the KDP and the PUK still control much of the region's finance, intelligence, and military, which they have historically used to suppress attempts at democratization.

To conclude, party leaders generally use the Internet and social media platforms to enhance their position and promote their public political image, rather than engaging with productive, fruitful, and influential conversation with online users over IK's critical political and economic issues. Politicians have simply adopted traditional political practices to the online domain.

⁵⁹ For Example, in the KIU: Abuabkir Haladni, Abubakir Karwani, Hiwa Mirza Sabir. In the PUK: Qubad Talabani, Barham Ahmed Salih.

3.2.3 *Pro-Party Pages and Accounts*

In the Kurdish social media, there are countless number of unknown and fake social media pages and accounts that support both parties and their leaders. These pages and accounts use political party logos and names of political parties in creating their online profile.⁶⁰ Officially, political parties have not confirmed that these pages and

⁶⁰ For example: for PUK: (<https://www.facebook.com/PUKofficial.org/?fref=ts>). PUK online: (<https://www.facebook.com/PukOnline/?fref=ts>). Slemani Qalay Sawz – Sulaymanyiah a green fort: (<https://www.facebook.com/akar.sawz?pnref=story>). Yaketi Nishtimani – union patriotic: (<https://www.facebook.com/Yaketi-Nishtimani-124065621113629/?fref=ts>). Ganjani Yaketi – PUK youths: (<https://www.facebook.com/yaketi/?fref=ts>). Bas Yaketi Bas – Only PUK: (<https://www.facebook.com/soranpirababy1?fref=ts>). PUK Koya center (14), Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi14koya/?fref=ts>). Leadership council of PUK: (https://www.facebook.com/pukpbYNK/?fref=ts&oref=br_tf). Central council of PUK: (<https://www.facebook.com/AnjumaniNawandPukcc/?fref=ts>). PUK politburo – Erbil: (<https://www.facebook.com/MktbySyasyYktyNyshtmanyKwrdsanHwlr/?fref=ts>).
60 PUK: (<https://www.facebook.com/PUKofficial.org/?fref=ts>). PUK online: (<https://www.facebook.com/PukOnline/?fref=ts>). Slemani Qalay Sawz – Sulaymanyiah a green fort: (<https://www.facebook.com/akar.sawz?pnref=story>). Yaketi Nishtimani – union patriotic: (<https://www.facebook.com/Yaketi-Nishtimani-124065621113629/?fref=ts>). Ganjani Yaketi – PUK youths: (<https://www.facebook.com/yaketi/?fref=ts>). Bas Yaketi Bas – Only PUK: (<https://www.facebook.com/soranpirababy1?fref=ts>). Kcha Sawzaka – the Green Girl, Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/676324522405539/?fref=nf>). Yaketi Ayindaya – PUK is future: (<https://www.facebook.com/YeketiAyndaya/?fref=ts>). Mn yaketim Khwenm Sawza – I am puk and blood is green: (<https://www.facebook.com/yaketim/?fref=ts>). Yaketiw Khabati Sakht – PUK and difficult strive: (<https://www.facebook.com/YktyWKhbatySkht/?fref=ts>). Yaketiw Mardayati – PUK and Braveness: (<https://www.facebook.com/mamekurdd/?fref=ts>). Layangranu Hawadarani Yaketi la Facebook – PUK fans and supporters in Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/p.u.k.talabani/?fref=ts>). Mn PUKim – I am PUK: (<https://www.facebook.com/mn.Yakitym/?fref=ts>). Dwangay PUK – the PUK platform: (<https://www.facebook.com/541331179357680/?fref=ts>). Ganjanu Lawani PUK – PUK youths and adults: (<https://www.facebook.com/ganjani.yaketi/?fref=ts>). Peshmarga derinakani PUK – Old PUK meshmarga: (<https://www.facebook.com/peshmarga.derin/?fref=ts>). Gardaluli Sawz – the Green Storm: (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010434760585&fref=ts>). Ganjani PUK – the PUK youths: (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100008538273918&fref=ts>). For KIU: KIU Sulaymanyia center (<https://www.facebook.com/malbandislemay.yakgrtu?fref=ts>), KIU Erbil Centre (<https://www.facebook.com/malbandedu.hawler>), KIU Halabja Center (<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi.penj?fref=ts>), KIU Garmyian Center (<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi4/?fref=ts>), KIU Chamchamal Center (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010059787333&fref=ts>), KIU Mosul center (<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi.hasht?fref=ts>), KIU 14 center (<https://www.facebook.com/320941634783092/?fref=ts>), KIU Kalakchy Branch (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010934496229&fref=ts>),
60 For example, I am Erbil - KIU and I am transparent (<https://www.facebook.com/yekgrtoihawlerm.shafafm/?fref=ts>), Kurdistan Islamic Union (<https://www.facebook.com/Kurdistan.Islamic.Union?fref=ts>), Youth of KIU (<https://www.facebook.com/lawany.yakgrtuy.islamy/?fref=ts>), A New KIU (<https://www.facebook.com/kiu94/?fref=ts>), KIU is our crown

accounts are run by or associated with them. These pages and accounts are mostly established by members and fans, or unknown individuals.

There are some differences on how these pro-party pages and accounts related to both the PUK and KIU. In the case of the PUK, the pro-PUK online pages are divided among party leaders and do not back all the PUK leaders equally. This phenomenon could be explained as a result of disagreements and disputes between wings inside the party that emerged after disappearance of Jalal Talabani from the political scene and party leadership. For example, a page named (Dlsozani Qubad Talabani – supporters of Qubad Talabani)⁶¹ supports Qubad Talabani but not Barham Salih. In comparison, pro-KIU accounts and pages generally support the KIU as a party, rather than favouring a specific leader.

These pages and accounts performing several functions: they publish information on political parties and their leaders' activities, on political scandals, and republish what leaders have published in their personal accounts and pages in a way that is supportive to the party's policies and image. These pages and accounts are more interactive due to the nature of their contents. For instance, the pro-PUK social media pages and accounts actively share information on the party's rivals, particularly the KDP and Goran, or the

(<https://www.facebook.com/yakgrtw.dllmana?fref=ts>), we are KIU and we succeed
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/712032122191101/>), KIU closed Group
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/yakgrtu.ayndaya/>), we are KIU
(<https://www.facebook.com/emayekgrtwin/?fref=ts>), KIU youths
(<https://www.facebook.com/yakgrtu.hiwawainda?fref=ts>), KIU youth in Chamchamal
(https://www.facebook.com/groups/311617085566294/?ref=br_tf), KIU youths in Sulaymanya
(<https://www.facebook.com/?fref=ts>), KIU youths in Garmian
(<https://www.facebook.com/garmianyagrtw?fref=ts>), KIU youths leadership
(<https://www.facebook.com/balesan.sane?fref=ts>), Brave KIU youths
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/211243912317060/>), Insurgents
(<https://www.facebook.com/nawakiu/?fref=ts>), Shaqam 'Street'
(<https://www.facebook.com/Shaqam0/?fref=ts>), Chalakwanani Yakgrtw la Facebook (KIU activists in Facebook) (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/301133600052448/>)

⁶¹ <https://www.facebook.com/DlsozaniQubadTalabani/>

governmental institutions they run in a way that targets their credibility. The information is usually communicated aggressively and targets party leaders and their political program. On several occasions, Masoud Barzani, the KDP president, announced reform projects to the IK governance system. The pro-PUK Facebook pages attacked his program and described him as the illegitimate regional president of Kurdistan, dysfunctional in doing reform, and questioned his credibility.⁶² Three pro-PUK online pages also published information on corruption in the oil sector and the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), run by the KDP. They accused the ministry of not being truthful with the KDP by concealing the real data and oil revenues from the public.⁶³

These pro-party social media pages and accounts have some implications for political discussion and the democratisation process. On one hand, they could have a positive impact on generating political discussion. Citizens can rely on social media for networking, organising online groups, addressing politicians, and participating in the party leaders' online activities.

On the other hand, these pro-party pages and accounts play a negative role in terms of damaging democratic politics in Kurdish society. The unknown and fake accounts damage democratic deliberation because of the unpleasant and sinister political language that is often used in framing political issues. These accounts were not initially established for democratic purposes, but to launch attacks on political rivals. Consequently, politicians may not be interested in engagement with this style of political language. Rizgar Hamajan, a PUK leader, asserted that the 'PUK will not pay

⁶² PUK is the Future, I am PUK my blood is green; Youth of PUK)

⁶³ Ibid.

attention to these fake accounts when they address our party because it is not telling the truth and do not represent real individuals' (Hamajan, 2015).

With respect to the pro-party accounts and pages of the PUK and the KIU, it can be noticed that the information from these accounts may be counter-productive to democratization. Both parties carry out the same practices to different degrees: the pro-PUK accounts and pages are more active than the KIU's. The information communicated by these accounts is unsuitable for rational and informed democratic debate among users. They publish incorrect, misleading, unfiltered, information that is often rumours, in addition to propaganda. They also manipulate the contents and original meaning of leaders' political statements, in order to present information provocatively. They also encourage a culture of intolerance among users and political forces and encourage useless talks rather than rational and democratic debate. They organise attacks on the personality of leaders, political activists, and prominent figures. These accounts and pages aim to provoke online war between political parties, which is incompatible with democratic politics. For example, On 7 February 2017, the KIU's secretary general, Salahaddin Mohammad Bahauddin, organised an open debate with journalists and intellectuals in IK. In this debate, he criticised a parliamentary speaker, Yousuf Mohammad Sadiq from Goran, for not correctly dealing with the Kurdistan presidential crisis.⁶⁴ Consequently, Goran leaders, including Yousuf Sadiq responded to the statement, and accused him of supporting the illegal presidency of Masoud Barzani. Instead of debating this issue rationally, a pro-Goran online page named (Anjumani

⁶⁴ see the KIU secretary general Facebook page
(<https://www.facebook.com/pg/salahadin.muhammed/posts/>)

Bzutnaway Goran la Facebook – Gorran Movement council in Facebook)⁶⁵ attacked the KIU secretary general, labelling him as a coward and pro-KDP figure. Similarly, on 23 March 2017, Abubakir Haladni, a KIU parliamentarian and a member of the party's leadership council, suggested in the NRT political show that the PUK suspend oil and gas exports from the Slemani province, a PUK influence zone, to compel the KDP to normalise the political situation in IK (NRT, 2017). Consequently, a pro-KDP page called (layangrani Party w Barzani la Kurdistan – Supporters of KDP and Barzani in Kurdistan)⁶⁶ compared Abubakr's suggestion to the ISIS terrorist mentality; pro-KIU pages labelled the KDP as traitors, conspirators with regional states, murderers, and as corrupt. These online wars between Kurdish political parties seem do not create a culture that is tolerant, civilized, and open to debate and democratisation. Therefore, these online practices may negatively influence citizens and the societal social security; social media in this situation may not serve democratic politics but could provoke social and political unrest.

Moreover, these pro-party online pages and accounts have a negative impact on party relations, inter-party competition, political dynamics, and political settlements. The online dynamics around the regional presidency crisis in IK in 2015 is the best example to be cited. According to Adnan Muftis, a PUK leader, the political dynamics on Facebook has provided opportunities for people to create pages that aim to trigger feelings of hatred and aversion; it can 'play a negative role in the party's political relations', and can deteriorate relationships and trust between parties, making political compromise unattainable (Mufti, 2015).

⁶⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/anjumanygo/>

⁶⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/layangeranipdklakurdistan/>

Unknown and fake accounts may influence the course of interactivity in the online world. A politician or political leader may receive follow requests from unknown users. In IK, anonymity is a big problem for users especially political leader because there are countless accounts created by the party security forces (the KDP and the PUK) to monitor the online space. Leaders like Abubakir Karwani and Mohammad Rauf set out their reasons for being careful with fake accounts. According to Karwani, security agents may sometimes 'use social media in the name of protecting security to monitor activists, dissent, and other political parties' (Karwani, 2015). Rauf highlights that he is cautious with friend requests from unknown individuals because 'I do not know where this user tells the truth, where this user hide the truth, and how does the user treat my contents' (Rauf, 2015).

In the Kurdish social media, fake accounts are a common phenomenon. There is a strong suspicion that individual citizens, political parties' members, political party institutions and intelligence agencies of political parties (the KDP and the PUK) are behind these fake accounts. A report documents that the KDP and the PUK party security forces are monitoring the online communication and putting social media under strict surveillance (U.S. Department of State, 2015). A prominent example of an online victim is Sardasht Osman, a 23-year-old freelance journalist and student. He was abducted on 4 March 2010 in front of Salahddin University because of his writings on the Internet about KDP high officials. Two days later, his body was found in Mosul city: no one had been arrested or punished for this crime (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Several cases of beating, kidnapping or even killing on Facebook posts were recorded by the US Department of State report on human rights in Iraq and the Kurdistan region

(U.S. Department of State, 2015). Most recently, a policeman named Shivan Azad was sentenced for five years in jail for posting a video on his Facebook account criticizing KRG officials over poverty, low salaries and lack of provision of essential services (Ekurd Daily, 2015).

When citizens see how security forces treat online dissent and criticism, they may abstain from political participation, criticizing the government officials, from exposing information on them, or engaging with politicians and developing activism. In this case, the Internet and social media become resources to counter democracy and democratization.

The stated intention of party security forces is to prevent the use of social media for terrorist purposes, especially since 2014, the IK is at war with so-called the Islamic State (ISIS), which relies on social media for communication, recruitment, propaganda, and radicalization. Party security forces also put the online sphere under surveillance to monitor dissent and online political activism. According to Barham Ahmed Salih,

Party security apparatuses are buying the most sophisticated surveillance software to discover the identity of the fake account holders. Party security apparatuses have developed a sort of technology to change public opinion inside Facebook through amending comments and likes of specific posts (Salih, 2015).

This statement is probably the best explanation for the countless number of fake accounts, as fake accounts allow citizens to bypass the party's security surveillance; they can also be used to disseminate information in unaccountable ways.

Although social media can stimulate interactivity between citizens and political leaders, the party websites, leaders' pages and accounts in general indicate that the Internet and social media play a limited role in democratization. These online resources are mostly used like traditional media outlets and in a unidirectional style rather than social media usage being used to facilitate democratic deliberation, which, in turn, contributes to democratic consolidation. Political parties and leaders tend to use the Internet and social media mostly to publicize their political activities, dissemination of information, advertising for their political brand, and self-promotion.

4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the role of parties' online resources and websites, leaders' pages and accounts, and pro-party accounts and pages in enhancing political discussion between political parties and citizens and its implications for democratization politics in IK. Political discussion is a requirement of democracy: democratization cannot happen without political debate and discussion between politicians and citizens. The arrival of the Internet and social media platforms into IK was an important technological development and significant asset for strengthening political discussion. In addition, the Internet and social media are valuable online resources for facilitating political discussion between Kurdish citizens and politicians. Social media can bridge distance and bring people into a domain of communication and connection for democratic discussion.

The empirical findings indicate that the Internet and social media are new and vital sources recently adopted by political parties, as they offered users a space for

engagement by political parties and party leaders. They allow citizens and party leaders to communicate directly with each other without relying on mainstream media outlets. These are important developments in the nascent Kurdish democracy as previously that kind of connection was impossible to imagine. However, the available online resources are rarely used to serve the objectives of strengthening political discussion. The party websites are mostly used in ways that resemble the conventional media outlets. The party websites mainly share the contents disseminated in conventional party media outlets in a unidirectional style unsupportive of rational, informed, and deep political discussion. Moreover, the websites contain various kinds of information about the activities of party branches and party leaders, but there is no information on government policies, law proposals, public policy drafts, and policy issues. These contents are unproductive in increasing citizens' knowledge necessary for engaging in an informed and rational political debate with politicians.

Furthermore, the structure of the party websites also is not designed to generate democratic political discussion between the users and the party officials. There is no section in the party websites dedicated to invite citizens and online users to engage with the party leaders, participate in political debate, discuss, exchange, give opinions, and make inputs into the public policy choices, government issues, political strategies and party policies. Hence, party websites do not contribute to strengthening political discussion.

The online pages and accounts of individual leaders of both parties play an important role in linking citizens with the party leaders outside the party's organizational structure. Previously, that link was less likely to occur without reliance

on the party resources. Moreover, the party leaders can freely generate self-produced contents and directly communicate with the online users. However, the findings indicate that the role of party leaders' online accounts and pages in political discussion and deliberation is weak and limited. The party leaders seldom use their online accounts and pages as a forum for establishing discussion and conversation about politics. They mainly use the accounts and pages for self-promotion, reporting political activities, advertising and enhancing their personal and political brand. It is difficult to see high quality, continual, genuine, rational, and informed democratic discussion in these accounts and pages. Occasionally, a handful of the party leaders individually address citizens' political preferences, highlight citizens' daily problems, and independently create influential public political discourse. There is little evidence that the limited interactivity on these social media sites have an impact on the public policy, party strategies, and decision-making process in the KRG institutions.

The empirical findings also indicate that the online pro-party pages and accounts play a negative role in enhancing political discussion. Both the pro-PUK and pro-KIU accounts have similar characteristics on this issue. These accounts and pages were not designed to achieve democratic objectives: they were established to launch attacks on political rivals. These accounts foster hatred, intolerance, and a nondemocratic culture among the online users. Therefore, these accounts are damaging political discussion and are counter-productive to democratization

Lastly, it can be concluded that the Internet and social media have a limited impact on enhancing political discussion between citizens and party leaders and government officials. Political parties and party leaders do not use these online

resources for democratic purposes. Political elites and elite-dominated media outlets heavily occupy the online sphere, which is supposed to be free. These elites dominate online spaces with their traditional practices.

Chapter 6

Social Media, Elections, and Campaigns: The Case of the Kurdistan Parliamentary Elections in 2013

1 Introduction

Since 1991, IK conducted several elections including parliamentary, municipality, and Iraqi parliamentary elections. The 2013 parliamentary elections were one of the important elections in IK's modern history: it has changed Kurdish politics and the power dynamic among the Kurdish political parties; it was also a significant test for the nascent Kurdish democracy. The recent rise of social media platforms in IK has significant implications for politics in IK; the Kurdish election campaign witnessed the establishment of countless numbers of social media accounts and pages. Candidates and political parties used these online platforms for communicating messages and establishing communication with Kurdish voters. This chapter will first discuss how far social media democratize the campaigns and communication strategies of candidates and political parties during elections. Secondly, how social media platforms enhance citizens' engagement with elections and campaigns. Lastly, it will discuss the implications of online campaigns for democratic consolidation in IK.

This chapter uses the theoretical insights developed in Chapter Two under the title 'political communication'. Current theorization of political communication, social media and electoral campaigns is divided into two lines of argument: the first believes

that online resources have many positives for elections and campaigns. Online resources increased candidates' ability to publishing information on parties or politicians' activities, communicating political messages, promoting personality and image, issuing statements, raising funds, mobilizing voters to go to voting booths, organizing independent campaign from political parties, bypassing mainstream media and communicating directly with voters. The Internet and social media also benefit citizens' political participation in elections and campaigns, as these online resources enable citizens to learn about politics and support certain candidates; they also increase communication and participation by enabling the publishing of information and personal opinions on candidates and their campaigns, which reduces gaps between citizens, politicians and candidates.

The second line of argument poses that the Internet and social media negatively influence election and campaigns. Online tools further empower large parties and candidates over minor parties and candidates, because large parties can dedicate more financial and human resources to managing online campaigns. Candidates continue to use online resources in a top-down fashion and do not use the full potential of social media's interactivity properties to establish democratic dialogue.

This chapter concentrates on the 2013 parliamentary elections in IK. It consists of four sections: the second section examines the impact of the 2013 elections on Kurdish politics; the third section explores how social media shaped the 2013 election campaigns; and the final section discusses the findings of the chapter. The findings suggest that although social media transformed election campaigns in IK in fundamental ways, it is not an influential force in further democratizing elections and campaign.

Candidates and politicians use the online resources in unidirectional way, rather than encouraging democratic discussion, and to assert their power, manipulate the public, and achieve personal and political objectives.

2 The 2013 Parliamentary Elections: A New Era in Kurdish Politics

IK does not have a long history or experience with parliamentary elections. Since the 1991 uprisings against the Baathist regime, IK has only held four parliamentary elections.⁶⁷ Between 1992 and 2005, no parliamentary election was held due to the civil war between the KDP and the PUK from 1994 to 1998 (BBC, 2015).

The political parties changed dramatically between the 1992 and the 2013 elections. In the 1992 elections, the KDP, the PUK and other political parties participated as an independent list. Between 1992 and 2009, other political parties were established, including the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) in 1994, the Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG) in 2001, and Change Movement (Bzutnaway Goran) in 2009. In the 2005 and 2009 parliamentary elections, both the KDP and PUK participated in the elections under one list and formed government without the participation of other political parties (Kurdistan Regional Government, 2015).

The 2013 election was held on September 21, 2013 in the Erbil, Duhok, and Slemani provinces; 25 political parties and political groups participated. More than 73% of eligible voters voted on over 1,100 candidates for 111 seats (National Democratic Institute (NDI), 2013; Chomani, 2013). In the 2013 elections, all political parties participated in the election separately and the whole region was treated as one election

⁶⁷ 1992, 2005, 2009, and 2013

zone. Generally, the election was widely judged to be free and fair: all parties accepted the results (NDI, 2013). In the final result, five parties won seats⁶⁸ (The Independent High Electoral Commission, 2014). The election result illustrates that there was a significant decline in the popularity of both the KDP and the PUK since the 1992 election (Kurdistan Parliament, 2015).

The 2013 parliamentary elections seem to be having significant implications in the contemporary political history of IK. It drastically changed Kurdish politics and was different in many aspects from previous parliamentary elections conducted in 1991, 2005, and 2009. In the 2013 election, IK's political environment was completely different from that in the 1990s. The 1992 election was the first election and first democratic experience in IK. However, the outbreak of civil war in 1994 hampered the nascent Kurdish democratic process and resulted in the division of IK into two political administrations. After the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the KDP and PUK signed a strategic agreement in 2007 to divide the administrative and government posts between themselves (Ahmed, 2014). In the 2009 elections, both parties participated in the election under one list called the Kurdistan List, and the Kurdistan region witnessed the emergence of an active opposition front coordinated by Goran, KIU, and KIG.

Another difference in the 2013 election was the amendments to election law.⁶⁹ The previous election law allowed political parties to present a closed list of candidates to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC). It legislated that voters have the right to vote for the party list without voting for a specific candidate. Consequently,

⁶⁸ KDP: (37.79%) - 38 seats, Change List: (24.21%) - 24 seats, PUK: (17.8%) - 18 seats, KIU: (9.49%) - 10 seats, KIG: (6.01%) - 6 seats, Ethnic minorities e.g. Turkmen and Christians: 10 unchangeable seats Source: Kurdistan Parliament website: <http://www.kurdistan-parliament.org/>

⁶⁹ Law No 15 – 2013 (<http://www.perlemanikurdistan.com/files/articles/080713065045.pdf>)

political parties were responsible for running political campaigns rather than the candidate; the old version of the law granted extensive powers to the political parties to nominate candidates and identify their sequence in the party list. In the amended version, the law adopted a proportional representation system. According to the new law, the voter can ‘tick the name of one candidate in the list of the political entity, or the voter can only tick for a political entity’ (Law No 15 – 2013).

The new amendments to the election law have both advantages and some disadvantages. The amendment created an opportunity for the electorates to reshape the sequence of candidates in the list. This made candidates compete fiercely to gain votes to secure a seat in parliament. Therefore, the law, indirectly, placed the responsibility of campaigning on the candidates. According to Mohammad Ali Taha,⁷⁰ ‘it encouraged candidates to think about reaching out to the constituencies’ and forced them to actively campaign and appeal to the electorate (Taha, 2015). Similarly, Rewaz Faeq Hussein,⁷¹ noted that the candidate’s ‘qualifications and capacities of candidates played roles in gaining votes’ (Hussein, 2015).

Moreover, the proportional representation system not only placed the campaigning responsibility on the candidates, it also transformed candidates’ relations with voters. According to Begard Dîshad Shukrullah,⁷² it ‘created a direct contact between voters and candidates. It can be argued that MPs are truly representatives of their constituencies because they have been chosen by the direct votes of electorates’ (Shukrullah, 2015).

⁷⁰ Member of Parliament (MP) and spokesman of the KDP bloc in Kurdistan Parliament

⁷¹ MP in PUK bloc

⁷² MP and head of PUK bloc in Kurdistan Parliament

From these perspectives, the election law amendment in IK induced candidate-centred campaign on inter-party basis. The same trends have also been documented in other countries such as Ireland and Indonesia (Ahmad and Popa, 2014; Suiter, 2015). The 2013 elections transformed the two-dominated party dominated system and changed the political map of the region. According to Serhat Erkmen, the ‘political dynamics stemming from the conflict and/or collaboration between the KDP and the PUK have been replaced by a multi-equilibrium game and a more complex structure’ (Erkmen, 2013).

Furthermore, the election results contributed, to some degree, in diminishing dual-administration de facto in the region. Currently five political parties constitute the political process instead of the monopoly of two political parties (Abdullah, 2015; Salih, 2015).⁷³ Contrastingly to previous elections, in the 2013 elections, political parties did not form any sort of political coalitions. Consequently, as Farsat Sofi Ali, the KDP parliamentarian remarked that

The election produced a political diversity. As a result, the formation of the KRG eighth cabinet was delayed for more than six months because the balance of power changed and no political party gained a majority of the votes’ (Ali, 2015).⁷⁴

Additionally, the election changed the position of opposition parties: it transformed the position of opposition parties and turned them into a significant force in forming and stabilizing the KRG.

⁷³ Abubaker Omer Abdullah - MP and head of KIU bloc. Ali Hama Salih, MP - Goran bloc

⁷⁴ Farsat Sofi Ali, MP - KDP bloc

These statements indicate that the traditional players or kingmakers in the Kurdish politics no longer exist; nowadays other political parties can dramatically redirect the course of the political process in the region. The best example for this indication can be drawn from the latest political developments in the region. There is fierce debate among the Kurdistan parliament blocs concerning changes to the regional presidency law: the KDP aims to prolong the mandate of the Kurdistan regional president Masoud Barzani for an additional two years, while the other parties are attempting to prevent this (the Journal of Turkish Weekly, 2015).

Alongside the advantages, the new election law also posed some drawbacks. According Farsat Sofi Alis,

It resurrected and intensified tribalism spirit among political parties and voters because each party attempted to nominate famous figures only to gather votes like a tribal leader (Agha), or religious clerics, rather than concentrating on the specific qualifications suitable for parliamentary affairs (Ali, 2015).

Similarly, Abubakir Abdullah noted that voters are easily manipulated, thus there ‘were many powerful, high-qualified and expert candidates with fewer votes than those candidates without professional experience’ (Abdullah, 2015).

Despite some drawbacks because of the implementation of the semi-open list, it was a remarkable achievement for the election process, in that it offered voters a choice of candidates.

3 Social Media and the 2013 Elections

In parallel with the advancement of communication technologies and usage of social media by the Kurdish citizens, politicians and candidates increased their political presence on social networking sites. In the 2013 elections, political campaigning witnessed a tremendous increase of social media sites use, primarily Facebook and YouTube. Hundreds of uncensored or unverified pages were used as tools for election campaigns and many video clips were created and released on YouTube to attract Kurdish voters (Mhamad, 2015).

Through examining IK MPs Facebook accounts and official pages, it is possible to argue that candidates employed social media to achieve a variety of goals including targeting voters, communicating their message, mobilizing citizens to vote, and persuading them to vote in certain ways. It is possible to distinguish between the positives and negatives of social media usage and assess their implications for democratization of elections and campaign.

3.1 Positive Implications of Social Media for Elections and Campaigns

3.1.1 Publishing and Sharing Information and Communicating Messages

Social media platforms have many positive implications for elections and campaigns. For the Kurdish candidates, the prime purpose of using social media is to distribute information and advertise the candidates' political branding. Through examining social media accounts of candidates in different parties, it was found that candidates posted various information about themselves, including an outline of their

curriculum vita (CV), their academic qualifications, their aims and priorities when becoming MPs, their number and sequence in the election lists, their personal photos, photos of their activities and participation in public debate, seminars, local rallies and party campaign celebration, their statements and speeches in these activities, and reporting party activities in other places are quite obvious. In this sense, YouTube and Facebook were important channels for candidates to share short clips and creative posts outlining these aspects.⁷⁵

Kurdish candidates also shared other information about their personal views on, government and politics, political programs and political party's objectives, and information on specific government policies. Rabun Maroof, a Goran MP, used Facebook as a channel to share his political perspectives and vision with voters: he 'felt the impact of his online campaign on voters' (Maroof, 2015).

Some candidates, especially those from opposition parties,⁷⁶ used social media to uncover information related to corruption in the oil and other government sectors. For example, on August 23, 2013, Omer Enayat Saeed, a Goran bloc MP, revealed on his

⁷⁵ Sherko Jawdat Mustafa (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sy8yLNbrEI>) (<https://www.facebook.com/sherko.jawdat.mustafa/?fref=ts>); Vala Fareed (<https://www.facebook.com/DrVala-Fareed-337665219702097/?fref=ts>); Farsat Sofi (<https://www.facebook.com/farsatsofi/?fref=ts>); Omed Khoshnaw (<https://www.facebook.com/kandidi.jmare22/>); Ari Harsin (<https://www.facebook.com/Ari-Harsin-192565520870248/?fref=ts>); Mohammad Ali Taha (<https://www.facebook.com/MohammedaliYaseenTaha/?fref=ts>); Evar Ibrahim (<https://www.facebook.com/evan.ebrahim/?fref=ts>); Ali Mohammad Salih (Salih) (<https://www.facebook.com/Ali-Hama-Saleh-Taha-330509840320751/?fref=ts>); Brzo Majid (<https://www.facebook.com/birzo.majeed/?fref=ts>); Omer Enayat (<https://www.facebook.com/Omer-Enayat-H-Saeed-308135834773/?fref=ts>); Yousuf Mohammad (<https://www.facebook.com/yousif.mohammad.14/?fref=ts>); Rabun Maruf (<https://www.facebook.com/rabun.maroof/?fref=ts>); Munira Othman (<https://www.facebook.com/muniar.osman/?fref=ts>); Begard Dlsahd Shukrullah (<https://www.facebook.com/Begard-talabani-1388322491393034/?fref=ts>); Goran Azad Hamagamhan (<https://www.facebook.com/goranazad.hamagamhan/?fref=ts>); Salar Mahmud (<https://www.facebook.com/salar.mahmud2/?fref=ts>)

⁷⁶ Goran, KIU, and KIG before forming KRG cabinet 8

Facebook page that the KDP and the PUK illegally used government resources and the public budget for election campaigning in Garmyan district to buy citizens' votes (Saeed, 2013). Also on September 15, 2013, Yousif Mohammad Sadiq⁷⁷ published a video exposing a series of official government documents. The documents contained names of the KDP and the PUK political party officials who, they alleged, had retired illegally as ministers in the KRG without ever having been a minister. They received a monthly retirement salary of 4800 dollars (Sadiq, 2013). The video was shared 144 times by users across social networking sites. On September 18, 2013, Sadiq published another video about Ashty Hawrami, the minister of natural resources, describing him as the Oil Man and accusing him of smuggling Kurdistan oil. The video contained official statistics about the amount of oil that had been smuggled since 2006 (Sadiq, 2013). This video was also shared 172 times across social networks.

Similarly, Soran Omer, a MP from Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG), published YouTube videos on his Facebook account and page revealing sensitive information. In a video posted on 16 September 2013, he revealed that KRG officials had stolen 4 billion dollars from oil contracts profits with major oil companies in addition to other corruption cases in the KRG ministries (Omar, 2013). Additionally, Rewaz Hussien remarked that

I disseminated information about two issues; first, implanting parliamentary model as a form of political system and explaining the concept of legal responsibilities of KRG officials, because these two issues are strongly intertwined. Second, working on oil affairs and analysing

⁷⁷ Speaker of Kurdistan parliament – Goran Bloc

oil contracts signed by KRG to develop energy and oil industry in the region. I wanted to publish the most detailed information on oil contracts in my Facebook account and page (Hussein, 2015).

Another positive implication of social media for election and campaign is that candidates relied on social media as valuable tools to communicate individual messages. From this point, the Kurdish candidates approached social media sites to communicate their political message with voters. Rewaz Hussein, the PUK MP, stated that she explained her 'personal message to her constituents to vote for PUK and her, a message that she wanted to be sent in her own name' (Hussein, 2015). Her message aimed to mobilize voters, and convince them that voting for her and her party will be beneficial for them.

Similarly, Fakhreddin Aref⁷⁸ repeatedly shared his personal message. He concentrated on giving promises and shedding light on corruption in the KRG institutions (Aref, 2015). Also, Evar Ibrahim⁷⁹ stated: 'I communicated about the political program of my party and women issues in the region had priority. I appealed for a comprehensive political and economic reform in IK. Unfortunately, injustice has covered IK completely' (Ibrahim, 2015).

Other candidates in different blocs conducted the same activity⁸⁰ and concentrated on mobilizing voters to vote. Goran candidates put a centralized slogan on their social

⁷⁸ Fakhreddin Aref, MP from KIG and secretary of parliament
(<https://www.facebook.com/FakhradeeQader?fref=nf>)

⁷⁹ Evar Ibrahim, MP from Goran bloc and head of women's affairs committee in parliament
(<https://www.facebook.com/evan.ebrahim?fref=ts>)

⁸⁰ Begard Dîshad (<https://www.facebook.com/Begard-Talabani-1413009472324334/timeline/>) or
(<https://www.facebook.com/Begard-talabani-1388322491393034/timeline/>).

media accounts to encourage voters to vote for change, fighting corruption and unfairness.⁸¹

These perspectives suggest that social media have had a great impact on strengthening candidates' political campaign. Publishing information via social media is an important activity as it can empower parties' political communication with voters and citizens; it is also likely to increase voter turnout. Furthermore, it encourages citizens' interaction with the information because they can contribute to increasing familiarity with and deliberating on the information through sharing, posts and comments on activities via social media sites (Morris, 1999; Browning, 2002; Chadwick, 2006). Research indicates that 'gaining relevant resonance within social media depends on the ability to publish information and campaigns that users will forward within their networks, comment on, and recommend to other users' (Klinger, 2013: 722). Moreover, the online platforms were significant in promoting diversity in political messages. The Kurdish elections had never seen this diversity in political messages previously. Additionally, in the social media era, candidates have better opportunities to send out their message to the public.

3.2 Implications of Online Campaign for Traditional Media

In contemporary societies, mainstream media connect politicians and citizens and play an important role in transferring information from politicians to citizens (Curran,

Ali Hama Salih (<https://www.facebook.com/Ali-Hama-Saleh-Taha-330509840320751/timeline/>) or (<https://www.facebook.com/ali.salh.96?fref=ts>),

Abubakir Abdullah (<https://www.facebook.com/Abubakr-Haladny-392936154216756/>)

⁸¹ Evar Ebrahim (<https://www.facebook.com/evan.ebrahim?fref=ts>)

Ali Hama Salih (<https://www.facebook.com/ali.salh.96?fref=ts>)

Rabun Maruf (<https://www.facebook.com/rabun.marouf?fref=ts>)

Omer Enayat (<https://www.facebook.com/Omer-Enayat-H-Saeed-308135834773/?fref=ts>)

Yousif Mohammed Sadiq (<https://www.facebook.com/yousif.mohammad.14/?fref=ts>)

2011; Norris, 2011; Curran et al, 2012). However, mainstream media cannot establish a two-way communication; it can only work in a one-way fashion (Shirky, 2008). On the other hand, social media allow candidates to communicate directly with voters (Towner, 2012: 193).

Although, IK recently witnessed significant growth in media outlets (BBC, 2014), the main problem with the media landscape in IK is politicization of the majority of the media. Every political party has its own media, which is financed and administrated by the party's prominent politicians. This traditional media operates in a unidirectional fashion: the Kurdish media represent the parties' views and they are official mouthpiece for them (BBC, 2014). In this environment, it is difficult for independent media to thrive and operate (Chomani, 2014).

In the 2013 election, the political party media were engaged with campaigning for the party list and candidates alike, and hosting political debate among candidates. The party media integrated their engagement with campaigning with social media platforms as well (Rudaw, 2013). However, party media did not sufficiently amplify candidates' campaigns; the party media could not dedicate all their time and resources to a single candidate: each party had nominated 100 candidates for 100 seats (National Democratic Institute (NDI), 2013). Therefore, candidates were forced to use social media to enhance and promote their campaign and gain visibility.

The advancement of the Internet and social media influenced the relationship between the dynamics of political campaign and mainstream media in many respects. Firstly, it allowed candidates to develop, generate and broadcast a political message in a way that it was difficult to be done on mainstream media. Social media were also

enabled candidates to amplify their campaign and provided extra opportunities to be in constant communication with voters. Rewaz Hussien found that ‘Facebook did not limit her time and allowed her to post as much as messages she desired’ (Hussein, 2015). Similarly, Begard Shukrullah used Facebook to compensate for a lack of traditional media coverage for her campaign’ (Shukrullah, 2015).

Furthermore, Ali Hama Salih argued that candidates would be unwise ‘to rely heavily on mainstream media to organize their political communication and campaign, because in the mainstream media, a candidate cannot communicate his message perfectly due to time constraints’ (Salih, 2015).

Some of Kurdish candidates have a stronger social media presence than on mainstream media, relying on online resources as prime tools for their campaign. Evar Ibrahim preferred to use social media to organize his campaign independently, and thus ‘did not organize any campaigns on mainstream media and did not dedicate any budget to political advertisement’ (Ibrahim, 2015). Abubaker Abdullah highlighted that ‘throughout the election campaigning period I dedicated \$15300 to my campaign and spent \$11300 to campaign on social media and websites’ (Abdullah, 2015). Social media appears to enable candidates to attract the coverage of mainstream media for their campaign and dissemination of political messages and information. Consequently, candidates may reach out constituencies more efficiently. Ali Hama Salih reported that his writings on political issues on his Facebook page and account were republished and shared with other audiences 5 times, including by pages of famous news agencies like Rudaw and NRT (Salih, 2015).

Additionally, to further attract voters and maximize the echo of the campaign, candidates commonly linked their activities on traditional media with social media. According to Rewaz Hussien she uploaded her 'TV shows and debates into her Facebook page to offer voters extra chances, especially those who missed her TV presence during live-time broadcasting, to re-watch the program' (Hussein, 2015). Similarly, Mohammad Taha commented,

I uploaded my visual media videos on my social media.

Visual media are very effective and influential, and I think that without the videos that I made, my campaign would have remained ineffective (Taha, 2015).

However, not all candidates are equal in doing that, as the quality of information broadcasted by candidates is an important factor in attracting media attention for the campaign. Additionally, in IK, due to the lack of a nationalized media, all party-sponsored media provide coverage for their party's candidates, and exclude other candidates; however, the coverage provided for candidates is still limited due to the large number of candidates.

Social media could be vital resources for politicians to control their political messages and disseminate specific information to their public. However, some Kurdish candidates criticized traditional media for changing the contents of their statements and messages. For instance, Evar Ibrahim highlighted that media can damage a campaign; a website or TV might 'change an interview's contents in order to attract citizens' attention, and ultimately attack the candidates' personality and prevent them from winning the election' (Ibrahim, 2015). Similarly, on September 4, 2013 Sherko Jawdat

Mustafa posted a Facebook message informing his fans and followers that he was prosecuting Chropa magazine for distortion of one of his statements with respect to the KRG's responsibility to protect security in Slemani city (Mustafa, 2013).

These statements suggest that social media enables candidates to bypass the limitations of party-sponsored media and communicate directly with voters. This is important in IK because the main parties control the majority of the mainstream media and they give limited access to candidates from other parties. In this sense, social media compensates candidates for the lack of coverage by mainstream media. Bypassing party-sponsored media also enables candidates to be independent of party machinery in organizing their campaigns. Before widespread social media, candidates were dependent on their parties for resources in campaigning, which was insufficient to reach all voters and were limited to those candidates favoured by party leaders.

Additionally, social media campaigns enable candidates to broadcast their message more efficiently than mainstream media does; they are also not limited by the available time and resources as they are with mainstream media. However, social media provided privileges for candidates rather than citizens and further empowers candidates' communication strategies.

3.2.1 Implications for Networking and Interactivity

With respect to establishing networks during election campaigns, candidates and politicians also are concerned about keeping and maximizing their relationships during election campaigns. Social media give candidates the capacity to form a network of supporters with minimal cost, effort and assistance from campaign staff (Towner, 2012). In the 2013 elections, some candidates built networks via social media with potential

supporters outside formal structures and organs of political party. Regarding this, Mohammad Taha found that while his target audience is based in Duhok province, voters in Erbil and Slemani shared his content on Facebook without making any campaign on the ground. In both cities together, he received 5000 votes, which is interesting. He would say that a huge part of that was related to the social media, especially Facebook' (Taha, 2015). Interestingly, on September 13, 2013, Goran Azad Hama Gamhan, a PUK MP told his online followers how to take part in his campaign. He wrote: 'Dear brothers and sisters of Facebook; if you want to participate in my campaign and support my candidacy, please contact my team in every city and district of IK' (Hama Gamhan, 2013). Rewas Hussien also assessed that without social media, it would have been difficult 'to access unreachable election zones' (Hussein, 2015). Evar Ibrahim also found that she gained followers without any effort because people saw her 'photos in Facebook and shared it with her messages in their Facebook accounts' (Ibrahim, 2015). Ali Hama Salih found that his 'online campaign was a good factor in attracting voters in unreachable towns and districts. Through his page, tens of voters became part of his team and campaigned for him (Salih, 2015). As aforementioned, online campaigns can overcome geographical borders and allow candidates to reach out unreachable areas. Abubakir Abdullah highlighted that 'social media allowed him to campaign beyond the boundaries of IK, such as the Kurdish diaspora. Social media reduced boundaries and saved time' (Abdullah, 2015).

These statements suggest that social media are vital tools for candidates to recruit new members to their campaign team from outside the formal structure of political parties. As Abubakr Abdullah observed, 'sometimes, citizens through party membership

means will not follow a politician or a candidate. However, in social media they are online with the candidate and even support the candidate' (Abdullah, 2015). Social media also benefit citizens, by allowing them to easily connect with candidates. In this sense, social media probably energized uninterested citizens to engage with politics differently and even assist candidates for campaign on the ground. According to Farsat Ali,

Because of my online campaign, I received countless calls suggesting to further energize my online campaign. I also received unlimited positive feedback and requests for my contact number. The caller joined my campaign, helped with hanging posters, gathering people and voters to listen my speeches, and organized public seminars. Facebook assisted me to organise a network of supporters in a way that I did not imagine (Ali, 2015).

Additionally, social media offer opportunities for citizens to connect with and follow specific candidates, and search for their political preferences. Social media opened the door for ordinary citizens to be part of a candidate's campaign without membership in political parties. According to Abubakir Abdullah, because 'an online friend may have countless friends and links with unlimited networks the scope for familiarity with candidates will expand. It is not only that the candidates communicate with them, but also these online friends bring candidates access to unlimited online networks' (Abdullah, 2015).

This also suggests that social media can potentially challenge established hierarchies within political parties. Citizens have the opportunity to use the interactive features offered by this technology, and political parties have a new way to open themselves up to interested citizens who might not have had the time or capacity to become involved in the more conventional forms of party membership (Rommele, 2003). In this way, social media open a space for a new type of connection between citizens and candidates not based on traditional forms of party membership, but based on networking connections, which do not recognize any bureaucratic and hierarchical barriers.

With respect to interactivity, in democratic contexts, many scholars have studied the level of established interactivity between citizens and candidates generated by social networking sites during election campaigns. They mainly argue that social media enhances dialogue and democratic debate between politicians and citizens during election campaigns (Bruns and Burgess, 2011; Bruns and Highfield, 2013; Skovsgaard and Dalen, 2013; D'heer and Verdegem, 2014; Bode and Dalrymple, 2014). In the 2013 parliamentary elections in IK, social media provided opportunities to establish a dialogue and conversation on campaign generally. Through social media, users made suggestions, criticism, and express their impressions about the candidate and the campaign. The online conversation tended to surround the candidate's campaign and personality rather than specific political issues in Kurdish politics. Regarding this, Abubakr Abdullah argued that 'while some users proposed positive comments or directed critiques about the nature of the campaign, highlighting strengths and weaknesses of the campaign and how to empower it further. He did not fully utilize

online tools (Abdullah, 2015). Similarly, Mohammad Ali Taha found that he responded to ‘countless messages during the election campaign’ (Taha, 2015).

It is possible to highlight several types of online interactions in the Kurdish campaigns. First, interaction may occur over online contents generated by candidates during election periods. When candidates launch their online campaigns, they may receive likes, comments and shares of their contents. For instance, Rabun Maroof⁸² Gorran PM published contents to communicate messages, political marketing, reporting his political activities related to elections. His contents and messages were on fighting corruption and encouraging voters to vote for Goran to punish corrupt officials and received tens of hundreds of likes, comments, and shares. From these perspectives, the online content is important in generating interactivity and attracting users. It provided citizens with different political views about the Kurdish political issues.

Besides the importance of online content for interactivity, sometimes the political character of candidates encourages online users to interact with the online candidates. In this sense, candidates are not equal in their political character, and citizens may find their political preferences for a certain candidate. According to Abubakir Abdullah, KIU MP, his ‘campaign influenced undecided voters’ (Abdullah, 2015). Even within one political party, some candidates received countless followers and likes for their online campaigns in comparison with other candidates. For example, Ali Hama Salih’s⁸³ Gorran MP, campaign was far more popular than the rest of Goran’s candidates.

These statements indicate that conversation was mainly about candidates’ campaigns rather than genuine democratic debate on transparency and accountability in

MP - Goran bloc

⁸³ Ali Hama Salih (<https://www.facebook.com/ali.salh.96?fref=ts>)

government institutions, citizens' daily problem and sufferings, economic developments and job opportunities, and rational debate on political program of political parties and candidates. The online archives of campaign pages and accounts of Kurdish candidates generally indicate that Kurdish candidates tend to avoid interaction with the Kurdish citizens on these critical issues. Additionally, interaction between candidates and citizens remains superficial and candidates do not continue with engagement activities. The candidates' statements documented previously do not show that they engaged in 'sustained engagement' with voters (Edgerly et al, 2013). The majority of candidates broadcasted content with which citizens interacted, but only engaged with constituents superficially. However, this may still be significant to the democratisation of IK compared with the pre-social media campaigning era.

To sum up, online resources enabled candidates to promote their election campaign more effectively. Social media platforms empower candidates and their campaigns in terms of publishing information and promoting personal image, communicating political message, issuing statements, mobilizing voters to go to voting booths, bypassing traditional media and establishing independent campaign. The online resources are also useful to involve citizens with elections and campaigns, so that they learn about different candidates and politics generally, spread news, information and alter political opinion. Social media have limited implications for democratic consolidation in IK, as these online resources are mainly empowering candidates rather than citizens in allowing them to achieve their political objectives more effectively.

3.3 Negative Implications of Social Media for Elections and Campaigns

Despite the usefulness of online resources for elections and campaigns, some authors argue that social media does not necessarily democratize elections and campaigns. They highlight that online tools further empower large parties and candidates over minor parties and candidates, because large parties can dedicate better financial and human resources to manage the online campaign. It is common among candidates to use online resources in a top-down fashion and not fully use the potential of social media interactivity properties to establish democratic dialogue. Citizens do not have equal access to the Internet and social media geographically, and there is no guarantee that those who do have access to the Internet and social media will use them for political purposes. Social media news may be subject to information bias, manipulation, and exclusion of unwanted information (Chadwick, 2006; Grant et al, 2010; Towner, 2012; Graham et al, 2013; Jacobs and Spierings, 2016).

In the 2013 parliamentary election in IK, it is possible to observe some negative implications of the Internet and social media for elections and campaigns, which seems to be incompatible with democratization. While social media increase the ability of users to share information, it is not always possible to verify the quality of that information.

Mohammad Taha, a KDP parliamentarian, states that ‘you cannot trust these social networking sites’ (Taha, 2015). Similarly, Fakhraddin Aref, KIG parliamentarian, stated that on ‘Facebook, users publish countless misleading items of incorrect information with unknown sources’ (Aref, 2015). However, data is not available to show whether citizens and activists corroborate the views of these two parliamentarians.

Moreover, candidates mainly used social media in a unidirectional and top-down manner rather than in an interactive way. Their statements and online accounts indicate that their use of social media resembles mainstream media usage for campaigns. Social media platforms simply allow candidates to make their campaigns more effective by improving communication with the public and bypass party-sponsored media. These perspectives are also in-line with the findings of other studies suggesting that social media is mostly used in a unidirectional way (Bimber and Davis, 2003; Towner, 2012; Enli and Skogerbø, 2013; Bayraktutan, et al., 2014; Suiter, 2015). Moreover, as Mohamad Taha highlights, candidates can manipulate the content of their social media sites by blocking ‘specific users who want to disturb candidates by asking unwanted questions’ (Taha, 2015).

Furthermore, candidates’ presence on social media was temporary for the duration of the elections and nowadays the majority of candidates, even those who gained a seat in parliament, seldom write on social media for their constituencies. This indicates that candidates only had short-term objectives, winning a seat, rather than long-term democratic objectives and full utilization of online resources to enhance citizen engagement. There is no evidence to suggest that citizens can exercise leverage over candidates and campaign direction. Again, online resources further empower candidates and their political strategy rather than citizens.

Moreover, the social networking platforms can be used for online battles and attacks on candidates’ character and campaigns. Several candidates expressed their resentment about attacks launched from fake and anonymous accounts. Fake and

anonymous accounts and pages in the Kurdish social media seem to be a dominant phenomenon during and after the election campaign period. These accounts are problematic for the candidate's political communication strategies. Evar Ibrahim's revealed that there are countless accounts and pages in her name, which published 'moral accusations and unpleasant contents. Some of these pages insulted the Barzani or Talabani families' (Ibrahim, 2015); she had to frequently denounce these pages (Ibrahim, 2015). Rewaz Hussein also had this problem, and, on occasion, it forced her to abstain 'from using social media' (Hussein, 2015).

Fake accounts may constitute extra resources to launch counter campaigns on candidates; Farsat Sofi highlighted that this 'inspired feelings of anxiety for candidates; take candidates time and may influence a candidate's popularity and votes' (Ali, 2015). Despite this, some fake accounts and pages may be positive, allowing candidates to gain more visibility and enhance candidates' political reputation. According to Mohammad Taha,

When a candidate informs the public that an account is not his or her account, it gives an impression to the public that there are some users around the candidate who want to employ the candidate's name in order to attract attention', which increases the candidates' online following (Taha, 2015).

Some candidates turned to social media to reply to rumours and attacks on their personality and the reputation of the candidates. According to Farsat Ali, social media can be used 'to organize an attack on individuals and their personalities' (Ali, 2015).

Some social media accounts have attacked candidates, but candidates used the same tool to counter them. For instance, Sherko Mustafa⁸⁴ published online replies to all false information and rumours published on his campaign and his party (Mustafa, 2013).

Moreover, social media can be political tools to discredit rival political parties and candidates. Rabun Maroof documented his recollection about political campaign and slanders on Facebook:

In the election campaign the hideous way of campaigning is the strategy of switching focus from the concerns and problems of the public into attacking on rival candidates and exposing secrets of their personal life. Those who engage with this strategy should be labelled psychopaths. If they reach government institutions they will transfer their psychological ailments to these institutions (Maroof, 2013)

Similarly, Begard Shukrullah noted that

Social media are often used for slandering, aspersion, and attacking other candidates. If a political party felt unbalanced in votes and popularity with other rival political parties, the party will start ruining the reputation and personality of the strongest candidates of their competitors' (Shukrullah, 2015).

⁸⁴ Sherko Jawdat Mustafa, MP from KIU <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sy8yLNbrEI> and <https://www.facebook.com/sherko.jawdat.mustafa/?fref=ts>

Rewaz Hussien revealed that her political rivals sent her insults through her Facebook accounts and pages.

I received insults and unpleasant contents on my family and me. Sometimes, when I was receiving comments, psychologically they caused anxiety and apprehension and made me regret using Facebook (Hussein, 2015).

Evar Ibrahim also explained that pro PUK and KDP social media users left abusive comments on her page.

Some Facebook pages published moral accusations. Some anonymous pages labelled me an Iranian spy. In IK, if you have your own opinion and believe in different political perspective, then tens of social networking sites will blacken your personality. Because of these pages, the political bureaus of the KDP and the PUK tended to make a legal case against me (Ibrahim, 2015).

Alongside attacks on personalities and reputations of candidates, social media accounts and pages are also vulnerable to cyber-attacks. For example, on 16 October 2013, Rabun Marrof wrote that during the election campaign, he was subject to cyber-attacks on his 'formal Facebook account and pages then the Facebook Company prevented him from publishing any content' (Maroof, 2013). While Rabun never posted contents incompatible with the company's regulations, other users reported his page as part of attacks on his online campaign.

From these perspectives, the dark side of this process comes from the credibility of these contents; because social media are open to everyone and every citizen and group may use them for publishing contents. These contents sometimes are biased and lack credibility. They could be used for publishing rumours, propaganda, attacking on other candidates and politicians in influential ways. Using social media for rumours and attacks on political rivals does not abide with democratic principles. These practices are more likely to spread an undemocratic and intolerant culture rather than increasing democratic civic culture among online users, especially as social media enable citizens to become involved in these online battles.

In addition, the online battles and uncivilized use of social media among Kurdish candidates may negatively impact on citizens' trust in democracy and politics, leading them to abstain from politics completely. In this way, social media may fuel political polarization and intolerance in Kurdish society rather than contributing as a new element in the democratization process.

4 Conclusion

The 2013 election was a turning point in modern Kurdish politics. The election results introduced new political realities that were unimaginable before the election. The prominent political outcome of the election was the transformation in the party politics in IK. Kurdish politics were no longer dominated by the KDP and the PUK; they were replaced by a more complex structure with multiple parties. Although the KDP and the PUK still dominate many of the important sectors in the KRG such as finance, military

and security, it is possible to state that the KDP and the PUK are no longer the main players in Kurdish politics.

Arguably, the 2013 election was the first social media election in IK. One of the reasons of integrating social media platforms with election and campaign was introducing a new election law, which granted freedom for voters to select their preferred candidates. Consequently, candidates competed fiercely to secure a seat in Kurdistan parliament. Therefore, social media were important resources for candidates to organize their personal and self-managed campaign. Social media platforms are used for communicating political messages, promoting candidates' personality, reputation and political image, mobilizing citizens to vote, to create networks, make information available, strengthen relations between mainstream media and election campaign, and increase political interaction.

The findings in this chapter generally illustrate that social media empower election candidates and strengthens their communication strategies. It enabled candidates to publish unlimited amount of information to voters. This is an important step for the nascent Kurdish democracy because these online tools improve the availability of information. Before the rise of social media in Kurdistan, candidates were unable to reach a large number of voters. Theoretical considerations suggest that social media can positively impact the democratization process as online platforms enable candidates to publish information on parties or politicians' activities, communicate political messages, issue statements, mobilizing voters to go to voting booths, organize campaigns independently of political parties, bypass mainstream media and communicate directly with voters.

Social media also benefit citizens, and involve them with elections and campaigns beyond the voting process. They can support their preferred candidates, spread information, news and personal opinions on candidates' campaigns. Theoretical underpinnings also suggest that the Internet and social media also benefit citizen's political participation in elections and campaigns, as these online resources enable citizens to learn about politics, make informed choices about candidates, increase communication with candidates and participation in politics by publishing information and personal opinion on candidates and their campaigns, and reduce gaps between citizens and candidates.

Although social media have the potential to be a two-way communication medium; this chapter found that candidates and political parties mostly use social media in a unidirectional fashion. Candidates benefit more than citizens from social media resources: even citizens' involvement benefits the candidates' campaigns and popularity and they cannot practice leverage over online campaign and candidates. Therefore, social media are additional resources for candidates for self-promotion, reach out to constituents, and gain publicity rather than increase democratic discussion.

Additionally, social media are widely used in campaigns to smear the personalities of candidates and rival politicians rather than attacking them on the basis of their policies and political agenda. In this way, social media do not serve democratic consolidation in IK.

On the contrary, by using the online resources in that way, political elites contribute to diffusing intolerance, hatred, and undemocratic culture among citizens. Moreover, through social media, citizens have become involved in political struggles

among candidates, and further polarize citizens and society. Therefore, the use of social media in election campaigns does not necessarily lead to democratization.

Chapter 7

Findings of the study

This study set out to explore the impact of social media use on democracy and democratization in IK since 2003. This thesis argues that, although the Internet and social media facilitate political participation and political communication in the context of IK, signs that democratic politics are being enhanced because of IK's citizens' online participation seem to be weak. Despite scholarly expectations, the political participation and political communication facilitated by the Internet and social media platforms are ineffective and may not lead to IK's democratization. Some scholars assert that social media can lead to the rejuvenation of democracy in liberal democracies and claim that social media usage played an important role in mobilizing protests, which resulted in the end of authoritarian regimes during the 2011 Arab spring events. This thesis has explored these claims about social media in relation to politics in IK as a hybrid context, specifically in relation to political protests, political discussion and election campaigns.

IK has a hybrid or transitional political system. The Kurdistan region concurrently contains democratic and authoritarian elements of political system. In IK, there is political pluralism, elections, civil society groups, and media. Meanwhile, there are also some authoritarian features in the region. In IK, the power of political parties is bigger and more influential than the power of government institutions. Two political parties, the KDP and the PUK, dominate key sectors of power such as the security apparatus, finance and economic sectors. The Kurdistan regional government (KRG) suffers from rampant corruption, nepotism, and client-patron relations.

The advent of the Internet and social networking sites to IK encouraged citizens and political actors, such as political parties and politicians, to establish social media pages and accounts and to employ the technology for civic engagement, political participation, and political communication. Social media started to be influential forces shaping the course of politics in IK. This study aimed to understand the impact of social media use on the democratization process in the Kurdish case through three case studies. The first case concentrated on the influence of social media on the 2011 Slemani movement and its implication for democratization. The second case focused on the impact of social media on political discussion and interactivity between citizens and political parties, and its implications for democratizing citizen-government relations. In this respect, the study considered two political parties in IK: the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU). For the third case, the study concentrated on the role of social media in democratizing campaigning and elections during the 2013 parliamentary election in IK. The study sought to answer the following questions:

The Main Research Question: How does the rise of the Internet and social media platforms influence the democratization process in IK?

1. How does the rise of social media influence political participation of citizens and what is the value of that participation for democratic consolidation in IK? What are the benefits and risks of social media for political participation and the democratization process in IK?

2. How do social media platforms facilitate citizens' participation in social movements and collective actions? How do social media influence freedom of expression and opinion? What are the implications of these actions for consolidating democracy in IK?
3. How do the Internet and social media contribute to generating political discussion and interactivity between the Kurdish citizens and political parties and their leaders? What are the implication of online resources for democratic discussion and consolidating democracy in IK?
4. How far do social media democratize the campaigns and communication strategies of candidates and political parties during elections? How do social media platforms enhance citizens' engagement with elections and campaigns? What are the implications of online campaigns for democratic consolidation in IK?

This study has assessed the impacts of social media use on the democratization process by studying the type and nature of social media influence on political participation (as influencing attempt and as political discussion) and on political communication in IK. It did not seek to establish causal links between social media and democratization but rather to identify trends that may suggest the ways in which social media could, or could not, contribute to democratization. The study's justification for taking this course of approach is that it is difficult to isolate and gauge the precise influence of social networking sites on democracy, as democratization is a long and complicated process and may take place in a complex political environment in which many political, social, and cultural factors overlap. Furthermore, there are methodological limitations in isolating and gauging the political influence of social networking sites on social and political phenomena.

Alongside finding answer to these questions, this study attempted to achieve the following objectives:

- 1 . To assess the impact of social media on citizens' political participation.
- 2 To assess the impact of social media on political communication.
- 3 To assess the impact of social media on political discussion and democratic deliberation between citizens and party leaders and government officials in IK.

The main empirical findings were summarized within the respective empirical chapters. This section will synthesize the empirical findings to answer the study's research questions:

- 1. How does the rise of social media influence political participation of citizens and what is the value of that participation for democratic consolidation in IK? What are the benefits and risks of social media for political participation and the democratization process in IK?***

The empirical findings of the thesis chapters suggest mixed results of the impact of social media on citizens' political participation. In the case of the Slemani movement in 2011, social media was important in increasing citizens' participation in protests and encouraging them to stay in the protest arena for over two months. Social media connected the Kurdish citizens to online communities in the Kurdistan region and also connected global citizens with the political developments of the Arab Spring events. The Kurdish citizens were initially inspired by these events. They were mediums on which citizens built their hopes and aspirations in achieving political projects, advancing and defending their interests, asserting their values, organizing and constructing networks. Through social media, citizens shared ideas about strategizing

collective actions, and mobilization against the KRG. Furthermore, citizens used social media platforms as social forums to exchange ideas, launch conversation and deliberation.

Nevertheless, social media had greatly impacted the organization and sustainment protest activities such as sharing information and news, coordinating and announcing protest activities and locations, and broadcasting the political activities directly from the protest arenas without reliance on mainstream media and political organization. To a great extent, the online platforms lowered the barriers for citizen participation and mobilization. It amplified citizens' courage, and feelings of public support for political causes during the protest. With respect to citizens' political participation as political discussion, the study found that social media offers citizens the possibility of engaging with political parties, party leaders, and politicians about policies, even just criticize them. Before the rise of social media, these kinds of practices were difficult to conduct.

However, social media have contributed to the undermining of citizens' political participation. Social media facilitate the monitoring and surveillance by the security agents, who formulate and develop sophisticated strategies to monitor and control the online domain. In the case of the Slemani movement, security agents used social media to monitor and arrest activists. Additionally, security agents used social media to launch counter-protest campaigns to damage the reputation and question the legitimacy of protesters. Together, these measures helped to repress the movements and possibly dissuade citizens from participating in political life. Because of surveillance and monitoring, political participation empowered by online resources may not lead to

democratic consolidation. The 2011 Slemani movement was unsuccessful in compelling the KRG to respond to protesters' demands and in inciting political reform and improving the quality of governance in IK.

Social media are important tools for facilitating political participation, as both influencing attempt and political discussion; however, they are also effective tools in undermining political participation and may even be counter-productive for democratic politics.

2. How do social media platforms facilitate citizens' participation in social movements and collective actions? How do social media influence freedom of expression and opinion? What are the implications of these actions for consolidating democracy in IK?

On the one hand, by the virtue of social media, IK's information infrastructure underwent a substantial transformation. The transformation comes from an increase in citizens' capability to influence the flow of information and their new capability to challenge the mainstream media. This can be considered an important development for IK: IK's traditional media are heavily politicized, and seldom allow citizens' voices to be heard. In the case of the Slemani protests, citizens used their own mobile phones to record and publish events directly from the protest square to social networking sites. Before the development of social media, a small political elite controlled the media environment in IK: there was little room for citizens' contribution; in the age of social media, the elites' control over the media environment is reduced significantly. These developments are significant for the nascent Kurdish democracy because social media platforms provide a chance to increase diversity in news and opinions. However, the

impact of this news diversification on government decision and the KRG policymaking seems to be limited. The KRG high officials frequently make the most important decisions, which have direct influence on citizens' life without consulting the public.

Citizens can contribute by creating, designing, broadcasting information and news in videos and photos not only within Slemani, but also in the entire IK. The mainstream media and political party media, especially opposition parties, use citizens produced videos and images for their news bulletin. The information created and shared by users challenge the capacity of political party-run-media by presenting a different style version of information; it also undermined the political party-run media's control over the availability and publicity of information. Social media provided a space to inform the public about political events in a different way to the party-run media. Thus, social media decreased the ability of political party media to control political discourse.

Additionally, social media brought marginalized voices on board and provided a massive opportunity for citizens, especially youths, to use their voices, express and present their ideas to other fellow citizens without possessing any financial resources or writing skills. In a society like IK, where political authority oppresses individuals, social media can be a golden opportunity for individuals to express their feelings about injustice, oppression, and common grievances.

Moreover, social media contributed to the diversification of information sources and increasing the range and quantity of information supported by individual efforts. In IK's 2013 parliamentary elections, candidates posted a wide range of information about themselves, their political visions, and political programs. Furthermore, candidates shared information on their social media accounts and pages separately to the

mainstream media. In order to increase their votes and popularity, candidates from the oppositional parties posted highly sensitive information about corruption, misuse and wasting the public budget by the two main parties (the KDP and the PUK), using the government's resources for election campaigns; they also reported violations of election campaign rules and voting fraud.

Additionally, the party leaders employed social media to perform two basic functions. The first to broadcast information about their own political activities rather than the parties'. The second is to publicize their own political perspectives and visions, propose alternative policy and political actions for party leadership, and post meeting minutes about the political issues in IK. The online activities of the leaders contributed to increasing the personalization trends in politics, diversification of the range of information available for citizens, formulation and promotion of personal messages and design a preferred style of communication, and the increase in the capacity and freedom of the political leaders to influence the public discourse. Prior to the arrival of social media, party leaders had few resources to share their personal political perspectives and visions for the public. They had minimal opportunities to promote their own image and personality through the party-run media and party organs meetings, while social media amplified the opportunities for the party leaders to achieve personal prominence.

While social media transformed the information status in IK, the online information has a number of weaknesses. Firstly, the reliability and credibility of information supported by the social networking sites is subject to question and scepticism. Not all pieces of information created and circulated by the social media are correct and accurate, sometimes; information remains unconfirmed by official sources.

Another drawback is, due to the openness of social media for ordinary citizens, they can spread and broadcast whatever they want at low cost and without limitations. Therefore, social media can be used for broadcasting rumours, lies, slander, defamation, and for organizing psychological war. This has also created problems for journalists in Kurdistan. Some media outlets and websites post social media content without properly investigating the validity and accuracy of the information.

Additionally, politicians and political parties can also use social media to enhance their political communication and amplify their own political messages and activities, at the expense of in-depth deliberation and discussion. Political parties integrated their own media with party-run websites and social media platforms and broadcast information in a style that serves the party's goals and political image. These have also contributed to the politicization of the social media domain and have created polarization amongst social media users. Social media empower politicians in their political communication strategies and in achieving short-term objectives such as winning a seat in parliament, rather than real engagement with citizens over daily political and economic problems relevant to the public. Using social media platforms in this way does not serve democratic consolidation in IK.

As in the case of citizens' political participation, social media has both positive and negative implications for sharing information. It is difficult to assess what the overall implications are for democratization and it is possible that any positive effects of social media are counteracted by the negative effects of social media with regards to freedom of information.

3. How do the Internet and social media contribute to generating political discussion and interactivity between the Kurdish citizens and political parties and their leaders? What are the implication of online resources for democratic discussion and consolidating democracy in IK?

Political discussion and interaction of citizens with politics, representatives and party leaders is considered to be a prerequisites of a well-functioning democratic system: there is no democracy without genuine and continual political discussion and active interaction over political topics, decision making process, and public policies. With the arrival of the Internet and social media into IK, the Kurdish political parties and party leaders generally adopted the new technologies for political communication strategies through establishing websites and tailoring the party-run media with the social networking platforms. This study concentrated on two political parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU).

The empirical findings suggest that the Internet and social media accounts have very little influence on generating democratic discussion and interactivity between the Kurdish citizens and political parties, party leaders, parliamentarians, and government officials. Since the arrival of the Internet, political parties integrated online resources into their political communication strategies through establishing a party website. Both the PUK and the KIU have websites, which aim to conduct different functions.

In terms of providing spaces for political discussion and interactivity, neither parties' website's structure nor design grants sufficient space for citizens to engage in democratic discussion and to interact with the party leaders, parliamentarians, and government officials in both parties. The PUK and the KIU run their websites like other

party-run media outlets: they offer online contents in a unidirectional style and the contents are generally reproduced from traditional party media outlets. Therefore, the party online contents occupy social media space with mainstream media contents, which reduce the diversification of contents. The party website allows citizens to interact with the content by liking, sharing, and commenting on content: these forms of engagement do not represent genuine democratic discussion with party leaders over the online contents. Both parties' websites, like their TV channels and newspapers, are under the financial and administrative control of the political parties.

The rise of social media has granted the political party leaders more publicity, as the majority of the leaders of both parties have a personal online presence. However, the online accounts and pages of the party leaders mostly empower the leaders, enhance their political brand, and promote their political image. Leaders mostly are using social media in a unidirectional fashion, reporting their own political activities and promoting personal image. Some do post political ideas and political perspectives in the online space, and it is rare that leaders post information of policy proposals, invite users to participate in policy planning, discuss about how to address citizens' problems through formulating government decisions. Therefore, while there are countless online accounts, they do not generate genuine, rational, informed, and high quality democratic discussion from all users. They mostly report leaders' personal activities and their own perspectives and views about political problems in the Kurdish politics.

With respect to the quality of the interactivity generated online between citizens and party leaders, the findings suggest that although social media has been praised for increasing democratic dialogue and discussions between citizens and politician, these

claims are not supported in this case. The case of the PUK and the KIU illustrate that, although citizens are interacting with a handful of politicians based on political brand, personal reputation, and the posted contents, the interaction seems to be superficial and does not continue for long periods. Democratic theorists dictate that ‘ongoing talk’ is an important condition for democracy. When political leaders post online and citizens interact with them, politicians seldom engage with the citizens’ comments. Therefore, the circle of discussion and interactivity will not be completed and it is less likely to continue to establish an effective and productive democratic debate between citizens and politicians.

With respect to the Kurdish pro-party social media accounts and pages, there are countless unknown and fake Facebook and Twitter accounts and pages, which support specific political parties. Some of these accounts are established by the political parties and supervised by the party’s security agents. The KDP and PUK have strong online presence under fake and concealed identity platforms. However, members and fans of the political parties establish most of the accounts.

These pro-party platforms are not established to foster political discussion and enhance democratization politics instead; they organize attacks and campaigns to destroy the reputation and political images of their rivals. During and around the election campaign period, these online platforms published rumours, slander, and extrusion. These online practices do not serve the democratization process, as they contribute to creating an undemocratic culture, with intolerance, hatred, and polarization among users, which is ultimately problematic for democratization.

Another negative role of these pro-party online platforms is that they do not establish genuine, rational, and high-quality democratic debate. They do not present valuable information on the KRG policies, and the party strategies. The content is mostly the same as that which is produced by the party media outlets: pro-party online accounts and pages simply rebroadcast them for the online users. Therefore, political parties are indirectly invading social media spaces, which are supposed to be free, open, and transparent for all users. Political parties use these features to re-exercise their traditional control in the mainstream media domain. Moreover, the party security agents have opened some of these pro-party online platforms to put the online domain under surveillance and monitor social media accounts of users.

4. How far do social media democratize the campaigns and communication strategies of candidates and political parties during elections? How do social media platforms enhance citizens' engagement with elections and campaigns? What are the implications of online campaigns for democratic consolidation in IK?

Since 1991, a series of parliamentary and governorate elections have been organized in IK, including elections for the Iraqi council of representatives. This thesis concentrated on the latest parliamentary election in IK conducted in 2013. This election is considered to be important, because it led to a change in the balance of power among the Kurdish political parties, and transformed politics in IK.

The election witnessed tremendous use of social media by the candidates of almost all political parties. It was arguably the first social media parliamentary election in IK. In this election, social media were extensively used for political advertising, communicating candidates' political messages, mobilizing citizens to vote, creating

networks of supporters, disseminating information, and attracting the mainstream media's attention.

The increased use of social media in the 2013 elections was partly a result of the changes to the electoral law. Before the election law was amended in 2013, political parties largely controlled the election process; they directly nominated candidates for parliament in a closed list. In this case, voters could not vote for their preferred candidates, they had to vote for the entire list of political candidates. The amendment granted constituents freedom to vote for a certain candidate in the list. Consequently, the amended law reduced the power of political parties over the sequence of the candidates, and political parties reduced their support for candidates' campaigns: candidates had to rely on other campaigning methods. Therefore, social media platforms were widely adopted by the candidates for their election campaigns.

Arguably, the new election law changed the election system from party-centred campaign to candidates-centred campaign. With the availability of social media, candidates gained more freedom in establishing communication strategies. They became responsible for organizing, financing, and running campaigns in online and offline space with little reliance on their party's resources. Through using social media accounts and pages, candidates established direct and unmediated political relationships by communicating with voters, created networks of supporters and fans, overcame budget shortages, attempted to meet voters' demands and desires, bypassed geographical barriers, and shared their campaign activities on the ground. Furthermore, they posted highly sensitive information online to influence the public discourse and shape public opinion in their favour.

The online campaign allowed candidates to reach out to constituencies with no prior political affiliations with a candidate's political party. Thus, candidates became semi-independent of political parties' machinery in organizing their campaigns, as social media enabled them to be less reliant on the parties' resources.

Social media also altered the relationships between candidates, voters, and mainstream media. There is no doubt that the mainstream media play an important role in connecting candidates and politicians with constituencies and transporting information from candidates to voters. However, mainstream media are unable to establish two-way communication between candidates and voters. In IK, social media enabled candidates to bypass these limitations and communicate directly with voters. This is significant in the contexts of the Kurdish politics, because majority of mainstream media are controlled by one of the main parties, which provide limited channels for candidates to communicate with voters.

Moreover, social media enabled candidates to control their political message, unlike mainstream media, which mainly belongs to one of the political parties, who may distort candidates' messages, thereby damaging their reputation. This is frequently an issue in the Kurdistan region and some candidates took legal action against media outlets and websites for changing the statements and contents of their interviews and statements.

However, this does not mean that candidates rejected mainstream media completely. Despite limitations, candidates were also active on the mainstream media by participating in interviews, political talk shows, making media statements, and sharing videos of their whole activity on social media. In this way, social media

amplified the campaign and the scope of viewers for the activity. While some candidates' online and offline campaigning may attract coverage by mainstream media, this phenomenon is rare in IK because the politicized and party-run media mainly focused on candidates' campaigns within the party.

However, despite social media's potential to facilitate discussion and debate between candidates and citizens, the empirical findings of this study raise concerns about the nature and quality of the interaction online. The findings suggest that this interaction is superficial and there is very little deep and rational discussion between candidates and citizens. When candidates post information or a political vision on social media, and citizen's comments on the post, candidates rarely reply to the comments. Moreover, not all content generates interaction: content, which is relevant to citizens' life, generates more interactivity than more general politically significant issues for the public. Candidates also avoid entering protracted discussions with citizens and mostly avoid answering questions about sensitive political topics or issues. Social media provide an opportunity for dialogue, but the matter is related to the desire of the users to use social media in this manner.

Moreover, the problem of online incivility negatively affected some candidates. Fake and anonymous accounts and pages were used to launch online attacks on candidates, organize counter campaigns, falsely report candidates' accounts and pages so they will be blocked by the social media companies. These accounts and pages also published rumours, propaganda, lies, revealed information about candidates' private and personal life, and made false statements in the name of the candidates and politicians. These accounts and pages posed problems for the candidate's political communication

strategies and even their personal relationships. To avoid any possible misunderstanding and damage to their reputation and campaign, many candidates were compelled to present clarifications and explanations about these accounts and made clear that the accounts and pages do not belong to them. These pages also contributed to the propagation of a hateful, intolerant and violent culture among online users and citizens.

With respect to the impact of social media on elections and campaigning, it is possible to state that the social media platforms mainly empower candidates rather than citizens. After the election campaign, the majority of the candidates completely abandoned the online space. This indicates that candidates used the online resources to advance their own objectives, winning a seat in parliament, rather than enhancing democratic politics. Moreover, the use of social media in election campaigns also became an opportunity for spreading incivility and hatred. Therefore, it is difficult to see noticeable impacts of the online resources on further democratizing the election campaign and contributing to democratization process in IK.

Overall, the findings of the study have shown that social media do indeed provide new opportunities for political participation and political communication. Citizens have taken advantage of these opportunities in regard to political participation as influencing attempt. However, social media also poses a threat to political participation because of party security apparatuses using the online resources to monitor activists and put citizens under surveillance to monitor their online activities, which may lead to arrest and sometimes killing. In the case of political participation as political discussion, the findings were not very encouraging. Party leaders and politicians mainly used social media platforms in a unidirectional fashion for the

aforementioned achieving personal objectives. In the case of the impact of social media on political communication, the findings suggest that candidates mainly use social media to achieve short-term political objectives such as winning a seat in parliament. Social media platforms empower candidate's political communication further. These platforms enable candidates to do better campaigns, and to target voters and communicate their message more effectively. Therefore, the overall impact of social media on democratization is inconclusive.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

In light of the empirical findings of this study, the theoretical cases for the impact of social media on democratisation and the implications of the study of other hybrid regime need to be revisited in order to further understand social media practices across different political and social contexts.

The importance of studying the influence of social media platforms in a hybrid political system like IK comes from the fact that the system itself is not fully democratic. This study of the relationship between social media usage and democratisation in Iraqi Kurdistan, whilst not generating universally applicable laws and theories, does suggest some implications for understanding the relationship between social media usage and democratisation under other hybrid political regimes.

1. Implications of this Study for the Wider Study of Social Media and Democratisation

Regarding the implication of the study for political participation as an influencing attempt in authoritarian contexts, this study does, to an extent, confirm the results of research which considers social media as having a positive effect on political participation in authoritarian states. Social media and democratisation literatures in authoritarian states emphasize on the importance of social media platforms as significant resources for increasing political participation (Norris, 2002; Adams, 2009; Brundidge & Rice, 2009; Castells, 2009; Rahimi, 2011; Castells, 2012; Colombo et al,

2012; Howard et al, 2011; Jensen & Anduiza, 2012; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Towner, 2012; Howard & Hussein, 2013; Breuera et al, 2014). However, this study also demonstrated the limitation of social media platforms in achieving democratisation because these online resources are also useful tools for authoritarian regimes and their security apparatus to counter democratisation, by suppressing demonstration and dissent, monitoring individuals and activists, and countering protest strategies (Morozov, 2011). Therefore, this study, to a degree, confirms the result of research in authoritarian contexts, as these online resources are also available for authoritarian regimes to use it for counter-democratisation. In authoritarian contexts, the potential of social media to influence one type of political participation, such as participation in social movements and protests, is more observable than how social media works for election campaigns and political discussion generally. Nonetheless, participation remains constrained by the authoritarian aspects of the hybrid political system; namely, a repressive security apparatus and the weakness of state institutions.

With respect to the study's implication for the concept of political participation as political discussion, this study confirms, to some degree, the results of research in democratic contexts. Literature on social media and political participation as political discussion in democratic context argue that online resources increase access to information, provide a platform for open and free expression and a medium for informing citizens about politics. The public obtains opportunities to express political views and learn about other views. Social media provides opportunities for citizens to openly discuss politics, and criticize, scrutinize and even steer cynicism regarding the government and the established media, fulfilling a critical watchdog role. These

characteristics are encouraging for democratisation on one hand. But the other hand, these online platforms do not enhance interaction between politicians, representatives and government officials, and citizens. Politicians and party leaders seldom discuss law proposals, policy issues, and critical daily problems of citizens. Party leaders and politicians mainly use these online resources to promote their personality and assert their power and position rather than enter or generate rational, productive, and deep political discussion with citizens (Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Noveck, 2000; Sunstein, 2001; Noam, 2005; Hindman, 2009). This study's results are consistent with the theory debated in a democratic context, but it highlights the importance of also focusing on quality of communication in order to enhance political discussion.

Regarding the use of social media for enhancing political discussion in authoritarian contexts, this study has addressed the current gap in the literature. From the case of IK, as a hybrid regime that includes some aspects of authoritarianism, it can be hypothesized that online discussion in other authoritarian contexts may also be corrupted by security service agents or other actors with intentions to distort and undermine the political process in the interest of maintaining the political status quo. Additionally, policy makers in IK made very little effort to address and tackle these online-framed political problems through formulating effective government policies.

With respect to the implication of the study for theoretical debates on social media and political communication, the results of the study confirmed theoretical assumptions in literatures on social media and political discussion in democratic context. Literature on social media and political communication in a democratic context suggests that politicians and candidates using the online resources for enhancing their

position and empowering their communication strategies. Social media platforms became additional resources for politicians and candidates to enhance their control. The candidates mainly used the online resources as to achieve short-term objectives such as winning a seat in parliament rather than for democratic consolidation (Mocan et al 2003; Chadwick, 2006; Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008; Davis et al, 2009; Carlson & Strandberg, 2012; Colombo et al, 2012; Jorba & Bimber, 2012; Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012; Stieglitz & Xuan, 2013; Gainous & Wagner, 2014; Calderaro, 2014;). The case of IK emphasizes on the same assumptions that politicians are relying on social media platforms to (re-)assert their power and position, without necessarily creating discussion and debate between politicians and citizens.

This study addressed a gap in the current literature on social media and politics in authoritarian contexts. The extant literature has ignored the use of social media in elections and by politicians. From the case of IK, as a hybrid regime that includes some aspects of authoritarianism, it can be hypothesised that the ruling elites in authoritarian states can also take advantage of social media platforms to enhance their own position, strengthen their hold on power, and shape political communication in a way that serves their interests and rule, at the expense of enhancing political discussion with citizens and voters. We can assume that incumbent leaders in authoritarian states will tend to use social media platforms in undemocratic ways, including through unknown users who attack rival politicians and candidates, organise online campaigns to ruin and distort the reputation and credibility of candidates, and ignite a virtual battle between political parties.

2 Implications of the study for studying social media and politics for other hybrid regimes

It is possible to state that the case of IK is the first study on the implications of social media for democratisation in a hybrid regime. Whilst the findings of this study may be relevant for studying other hybrid regimes, nonetheless a great deal of care must be taken in generalising the finds of IK to other hybrid regimes. There are several reasons for this judgement; the first one is, although the general understanding for hybrid regime is there are both democratic and authoritarian elements in states political system, but hybrid regimes are not equal in adopting levels of democratic and authoritarian elements. Some hybrid regimes have a democratised the army and security forces, strong rule of law, but have problems with elections, or vice-versa. It is difficult to find complete similarities among hybrid regimes because hybrid regimes vary greatly.

The second reason is related to characteristics of IK: it is not an independent sovereign nation-state; according to the Iraqi constitution it is a federal region with some independence in some affairs. This consequently means that the region is not fully independent in organizing its democratisation path separately and away from direct impact of internal political dynamics and laws of the Iraqi state and institutions. It is extremely difficult to compare IK with a sovereign nation-state with a hybrid regime, which has full independence in how to move towards democratisation. More importantly the geopolitical location of IK is unique and there is no other hybrid regime in the world that have similar geopolitical location. The Kurdish nation and its land is divided amongst Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

The democratisation process is under the influence of political dynamics of regional powers. The democratising impact of social media usage can be understood within this regional dynamics but not separately.

The third reason is, it is vital to note that the impact of social media platforms on politics and democratisation should be assessed in relation to the off-line context and how it interacts with online activity, internal political dynamics of a given country as well as regional politics. It is difficult to find a context that matches IK in every aspect.

Despite the aforementioned reasons, the results of this study can be useful in hypothesising how social media platforms work for some aspects of a hybrid regime. From the case studies of this thesis, it is possible to hypothesise that the authoritarian aspects of a hybrid regime, repressive security services, monopoly of power and resources by ruling party, may undermine democratic aspects of hybrid regimes such as freedom of expression online, and political party pluralism. Social media platforms, alongside other resources, may be used for repressing dissent, protest, and any other forms of collective action, demonizing social movements, undermining political opponents, monitoring and violating privacy of individuals, and distorting online public opinion. Additionally, ruling elites in authoritarian states can easily take advantage from social media platforms to undermine democratisation efforts through re-emphasizing their political position, influencing public opinion and public discourse, strengthening their hold on power and redirecting the course of political process in a way that serves them.

It can also be hypothesised that in a hybrid regime, politicians and election candidates capitalize on social media resources to achieve some short-term objectives e.g. winning election and gain a seat in parliament rather than using the online resources to enhance their relationship with voters and listen to online public grievances and address them in policy making. The prominent trend in using the online resources is unidirectional fashion usage of these platforms similar to traditional media such as TV, and radio. Using the online resources in that way will not enhance citizen-politician relations and consequently will not contribute to enhancing democracy in a hybrid regime. Nevertheless, the case of IK, similar to that of the Arab spring countries, also demonstrates the potential for social media to be used to help citizens to organise protests and campaigns to bring about democratic political change, even if such a change is not initially achieved. Nevertheless, the case of IK, similar to that of the Arab spring countries, also demonstrates the potential for social media to be used to help citizens to organize protest activities and campaigns to bring about democratic political change – even if such change is not initially achieved.

1 Study Limitations

The study has offered evaluation perspectives on the significance of the social media platforms on IK's democratization status through examining major political events in the Kurdistan region. The study's methodology mainly relied on semi-structured interviews with activists, parliamentarians, and political party leaders and the contents of social media accounts and pages, especially Facebook. As a direct

consequence of this methodology, the study encountered a number of limitations, which need to be considered:

1. In the case of the Slemani movement in 2011, some individuals did not want to participate in the research. They were cautious about giving information on events that happened. Some of the participants on the study did not remember all the details of events because the events occurred in 2011 and the interviews were conducted in 2014.
2. For the case of the 2013 parliamentary election and political parties, the data was gathered in summer 2015, in which IK was in the mid of political crisis with both the regional presidency, and the war with so-called the Islamic State (ISIS). These two crises created some unexpected problems, including numerous cancelations of interviews with parliamentarians and political party leaders due to their visits to the war front and abundance of meetings among political parties to rectify the crisis of the regional presidency. Given the importance of interviews to this study, I rearranged interviews at times more suitable to the interviewees. It is probable that in more peaceful circumstances, I would have been able to conduct more interviews.

2 Recommendations for Future Research

The scale of this debate is extensive and multifaceted even at the local level. To generate better understanding for the impact of social media on democracy and democratization, more case studies are needed at local and cross national levels to allow further assessment of the impact of social media on democratization in the following areas:

1. Future research needs to concentrate on the impact of social media on political parties and political institutions in nondemocratic contexts. The majority of the research conducted on social media operation in this context area deals with resisting authoritarian regimes rather than the operation of political parties.
2. There is a need for comparative research in a nondemocratic context to address the factors behind generating interactivity through social media platforms. Some scholars emphasize the democratic features of social media, such as providing opportunities for interactivity between citizens and politicians. In some contexts, social media are capable of establishing forums for democratic debate. Research is needed to tackle this issue and explore the major factors behind it.
3. Additionally, research is needed to highlight the more general impact of social media on the everyday framing of political and social issues in IK and how social media contributes to creating a public sphere and potential impact of the online public sphere on the Kurdish society. Apparently, the online use of social media in IK is fast-growing and significantly influences non-political issues.
4. Research also is needed to learn about the influence of monitoring, censorship and surveillance on social media and its implications for political participation.

Lastly, despite what is often reported about the implications of social media practice and its uses for democratization in different contexts, the case of IK illustrated that, although social media platforms opened new spaces and further enhanced political participation and political communication, it does not mean that increased political participation will definitely lead to democratization. In a hybrid political system like IK,

online resources can be counterproductive for democratization, as the resource can be used to hamper democratic endeavours.

Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

A New KIU, Facebook Group (<https://www.facebook.com/kiu94/?fref=ts>).

Abdul-Aziz, Omer, former member of KIU leadership Council
(<https://www.facebook.com/145931072179944/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (10/10/2015).

Abdullah, A. (2013, June 30). Kudatakay parlamen (the coup of Parliament).
Retrieved February 20, 2016, from Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/arez.abdullah.official/?fref=ts>

Abdullah, Arez, Head of the PUK bloc in Iraqi parliament, Facebook:
(<https://www.facebook.com/arez.abdullah.official/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (22/02/2016).

Abo, Saeed Ali, the KIU Secretary General assistant for KIU internal affairs
(<https://www.facebook.com/SeidEli.Ebo?fref=ts>). Retrieved (05/05/2016).

Ahmed, Hero Ibrahim, the PUK politburo member; Facebook:
(<https://www.facebook.com/Hero.ibrahimA?fref=ts>). Retrieved (11/10/2015).

Ahmed, Mohammed, the KIU Secretary General assistant for Government and
parliament affairs (<https://www.facebook.com/MuhammedZerony?fref=ts>). Retrieved
(13/12/2015).

Ali, Abubakr (Abubakr Karwani), member of the KIU politburo, personal
Facebook page, (<https://www.facebook.com/Abubakr-Ali-Abubakr-Karwani-152421998162279/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (12/10/2015).

Ali, Kosrat Rasul, the second deputy of the PUK Secretary-General, Facebook:
(<https://www.facebook.com/Kosrat.rasul/?fref=ts>), Twitter:
(<https://twitter.com/Kosrat?lang=en>). Retrieved (17/02/2016).

Amin, Muthanna, member of KIU leadership council
(<https://www.facebook.com/Dr.Muthanna.Amin/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (18/11/2015).

Aref, Fakhraddin, MP from KIG and secretary of parliament
(<https://www.facebook.com/FakhradeeQader?fref=ts>). Retrieved (16/07/2015).

Asasard, Fared, Member of the PUK central council, Facebook:
(<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010210380476&fref=ts>). Retrieved
(10/10/2015).

Babakir, Salahaddin, the KIU leader and former ministry of electricity (<https://www.facebook.com/Salahaddin-Babakir-457228687637746/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (16/03/2016).

Bakhtyar, Mala, spokesman of the PUK politburo. Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/Mala.Bakhtiar/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (02/02/2016).

Bas Yaketi Bas – Only PUK (Facebook Group) (<https://www.facebook.com/soranpirababy1?fref=ts>). Retrieved (11/02/2016)

Bayan Nuri, Nuri, Bayan, Member of KIU leadership council (<https://www.facebook.com/bayan.tofiq.5?fref=ts>). Retrieved (16/03/2016).

Brave KIU youths (Facebook Group) (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/211243912317060/>). Retrieved (03/03/2016).

Central council of PUK (facebook page), (<https://www.facebook.com/AnjumaniNawandPukcc/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (11/02/2016).

Chalakwanani Yakgrtw la Facebook (KIU activists in Facebook) (Facebook Group) (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/301133600052448/>). Retrieved (10/02/2016).

Dlshad, Begard, head of the PUK parliamentary block, (<https://www.facebook.com/Begard-Talabani-1413009472324334/timeline/>) or (<https://www.facebook.com/Begard-talabani-1388322491393034/timeline/>). Retrieved (20/07/2015).

Dwangay PUK – the PUK platform (Facebook Group) (<https://www.facebook.com/541331179357680/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (19/01/2016).

Enayat, Omer, Goran parliamentarian (<https://www.facebook.com/Omer-Enayat-H-Saeed-308135834773/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (04/05/2016).

Faraj, Mohammed, former KIU Secretary General (<https://www.facebook.com/m.farajahmad/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (17/09/2015).

Fareed, Vala, the KDP parliamentarian (<https://www.facebook.com/DrVala-Fareed-337665219702097/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (04/08/2015).

Gali Kurdistan Satellite TV in Facebook (Facebook page) (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Gali-Kurdistan/104036909632178?fref=ts>), YouTube: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niEvK5MVmkE>). Retrieved (12/02/2016).

Ganjani PUK –PUK youths (Facebook group) (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100008538273918&fref=ts>). Retrieved (19/01/2016).

Ganjani Yaketi – PUK youths (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/yaketi/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (17/02/2016).

Ganjanu Lawani PUK – PUK youths and adults (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/ganjani.yaketi/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (13/01/2016).

Gardaluli Sawz – the Green Storm (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010434760585&fref=ts>). Retrieved (22/02/2016).

Haladny, Abubakr, government official and head of the KIU parliamentary block, personal Facebook page, (<https://www.facebook.com/Abubakr-Haladny-392936154216756/>). Retrieved (10/10/2015).

Hamagamhan, Goran Azad, the PUK parliamentarian
(<https://www.facebook.com/goranazad.hamagamhan?fref=ts>). Retrieved (17/03/2016).

Harsin, Ari, the KDP parliamentarian (<https://www.facebook.com/Ari-Harsin-192565520870248/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (10/10/2015).

Hawdiani, Mohammad, member of KIU leadership council and minister of Social affairs – KRG (<https://www.facebook.com/mohamed9hawdyani/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (10/09/2015)

I am Erbil - KIU and I am transparent (Facebook group)
<https://www.facebook.com/yekgrtoihawlerm.shafafm/?fref=ts>. Retrieved (16/11/2015)

Ibrahim, Evar, MP from Goran bloc and head of women's affairs committee in parliament (<https://www.facebook.com/evan.ebrahim?fref=ts>). Retrieved (16/07/2015).

Ibrahim, Khalil, member of the KIU politburo
(<https://www.facebook.com/khalil.badini?fref=ts>). Retrieved (03/12/2015).

Jundyany, Azad, PUK chief of information office, Facebook:
(<https://www.facebook.com/Azad.Jundyany/?fref=ts>), retrieved (20/01/2016)

Kcha Sawzaka – the Green Girl, Facebook group
<https://www.facebook.com/676324522405539/?fref=nf>). Retrieved (15/12/2015).

KDP youths in Slemani (Facebook Group)
<https://www.facebook.com/GanjaniKDPSlemani/>. Retrieved (20/12/2015).

Khoshnaw, Omed, head of the KDP parliamentary block
(<https://www.facebook.com/kandidi.jmare22/>). Retrieved (17/10/2015).

KIU Chamchamal Centre (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010059787333&fref=ts>). Retrieved (17/01/2016)

KIU closed Group (Facebook Group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/yakgrtu.ayndaya/>). Retrieved (11/03/2016).

KIU Erbil Centre (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/malbandedu.hawler>). Retrieved (10/01/2016).

KIU Erbil Centre (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/malbandedu.hawler>). Retrieved (06/02/2016).

KIU Garmyian Centre (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi4/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (11/03/2016)

KIU Halabja Center (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi.penj?fref=ts>). Retrieved (15/02/2016).

KIU is our crown (Facebook Group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/yakgrtw.dllmana?fref=ts>). Retrieved (12/02/2016).

KIU Kalakchy Branch (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100010934496229&fref=ts>). Retrieved (17/04/2016).

KIU Mosul centre (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi.hasht?fref=ts>). Retrieved (11/03/2016).

KIU Slemani centre (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/malbandislemany.yakgrtu?fref=ts>). Retrieved (04/01/2016).

KIU youth in Chamchamal (Facebook page)
(https://www.facebook.com/groups/311617085566294/?ref=br_tf). Retrieved (08/07/2015).

KIU youths (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/yakgrtu.hiwawainda?fref=ts>). Retrieved (09/12/2015).

KIU youths in Garmian (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/garmianyagrtw?fref=ts>). Retrieved (08/02/2016).

KIU youths in Slemani (Facebook group) (<https://www.facebook.com/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (05/03/2016).

KIU youths leadership (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/balesan.sane?fref=ts>). Retrieved (09/03/2016).

Kurdistan Islamic Union (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/Kurdistan.Islamic.Union?fref=ts>). Retrieved (24/02/2016).

Kurdistan Islamic Union. (2012). Payraw u programi nawxoy Yakgirtuy Islami Kurdistan (Internal manifesto. Erbil: Kurdistan Islamic Union.

Kurdistani Nwe Newspaper (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/Kurdistani-Nwe-209026845834974/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (21/01/2016).

Kurdsat Broadcast Corporation (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/Kurdsat/?fref=ts>), Twitter:
(<https://twitter.com/Kurdsat?lang=en>), YouTube:
(<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheKurdsat>). Retrieved (18/01/2016)

Kurdsat News (Facebook page) (<https://www.facebook.com/kurdsatnews/>),
Twitter: (<https://twitter.com/KurdsatNews?lang=en>), Youtube:
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F14vtOPp4pA>). Retrieved (10/01/2016).

Law No 15 – 2013
(<http://www.perlemanikurdistan.com/files/articles/080713065045.pdf>)

Layangranu Hawadarani Yaketi la Facebook – PUK fans and supporters in Facebook (Facebook group) (<https://www.facebook.com/p.u.k.talabani/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (13/02/2016)

Leadership council of PUK (Facebook page)
(https://www.facebook.com/pukpbYNK/?fref=ts&oref=br_tf). Retrieved (04/04/2016).

Mahmud, Salar, the PUK parliamentarian
(<https://www.facebook.com/salar.mahmud2/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (10/02/2016).

Majid, Brzo, head of Goran parliamentary block
(<https://www.facebook.com/birzo.majeed/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (04/11/2015).

Maruf, Rabun, Goran parliamentarian
(<https://www.facebook.com/rabun.marooof/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (11/01/2016).

Masum, Fuad, Member of the PUK politburo and President of the republic of Iraq, Facebook: (<https://www.facebook.com/PresidentMasum/?fref=ts>), Twitter:
(https://twitter.com/Dr_Fuad_Masum?lang=en). Retrieved (13/01/2016).

Mn PUKim – I am PUK (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/mn.Yakitym/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (07/08/2015).

Mn yaketim Khwenm Sawza – I am PUK and blood is green (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/yaketim/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (11/09/2015).

Mohammad, Mohammad Rauf, speaker of KIU leadership council
(<https://www.facebook.com/mohammad.raoof.3?fref=ts>). Retrieved (25/07/2015).

Mohammad, Yousuf, speaker of parliament - Goran
(<https://www.facebook.com/yousif.mohammad.14/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (24/12/2015)

Mufti, Adnan, Member of the PUK central council, personal Facebook page:
(<https://www.facebook.com/Adnan-Mufti-598276936912766/?fref=ts>), personal Twitter
account: (<https://twitter.com/AdnanAlMufti?lang=en>). Retrieved (20/11/2015).

Murad, Adel, Member of the PUK central council, personal Facebook page:
(<https://www.facebook.com/AdelMuradOfficial/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (11/12/2015).

Mustafa, Sherko Jawdat, KIU parliamentarian and head of natural resources
committee in the Kurdistan parliament
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sy8yLNbrEI> and
<https://www.facebook.com/sherko.jawdat.mustafa/?fref=ts>. Retrieved (11/02/2016).

Othman, Munira, Goran parliamentarian
(<https://www.facebook.com/muniar.osman?fref=ts>). Retrieved (20/10/2015).

Peshmarga derinakani PUK – Old PUK meshmarga (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/peshmarga.derin/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (13/10/2015).

Pira, Sadi, Member of the PUK politburo, Facebook:
(<https://www.facebook.com/Sadi-Pire-307023045162/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (19/01/2016).

PUK Koya centre (14), Facebook page
(<https://www.facebook.com/malbandi14koya/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (02/11/2015).

PUK Media website (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/pukmedia1975/?fref=ts>), Twitter:
(<https://twitter.com/pukmedia?lang=en>). Retrieved (04/11/2015).

PUK online (Facebook page) (<https://www.facebook.com/PukOnline/?fref=ts>),
Twitter: (<https://twitter.com/PUKonline?lang=en>). Retrieved (06/10/2015)

PUK online (Facebook page) (<https://www.facebook.com/PukOnline/?fref=ts>).
Retrieved (08/11/2015).

PUK politburo – Erbil (Facebook page)
(<https://www.facebook.com/MktbySyasyYktyNyshtmanyKwrdrstanHwlr/?fref=ts>).
Retrieved (06/11/2015).

Qadir, Hakm, Member of the PUK politburo, Facebook:
(<https://www.facebook.com/hakim.qadir.hamajan/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (02/03/2016).

Rozhana News (Facebook group), <https://www.facebook.com/Rozhane.Hewal/>.
Retrieved (10/12/2015).

Sabir, Hiwa Mirza, Spokesman of KIU Politburo
(<https://www.facebook.com/hiwamirza.sabir?fref=ts>). Retrieved (10/07/2015).

Salih, Ali Hama, Goran Parliamentarian (<https://www.facebook.com/Ali-Hama-Saleh-Taha-330509840320751/timeline/>) or
(<https://www.facebook.com/ali.salh.96?fref=ts>), Retrieved (22/08/2015).

Salih, Barham Ahmed, the PUK deputy secretary – general; Facebook:
(<https://www.facebook.com/Barham-Salih-112851263139/?fref=ts>), Twitter:
(<https://twitter.com/BarhamSalih?lang=en>). Retrieved (23/08/2015)

Shamerani, Hasan, chief of KIU monitoring and follow up office
(<https://www.facebook.com/HasanShamerani/posts/766936090078975?fref=nfandpnref=story>). Retrieved (12/12/2015).

Shamirani, Sherwan, member of KIU leadership council and advisor to KIU secretary general (<https://www.facebook.com/-708121349313361/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (12/11/2015)

Shaqam ‘Street’ Facebook group
(<https://www.facebook.com/Shaqam0/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (07/02/2014).

Sleman Qalay Sawz – Sulaymanyah a green fort (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/akar.sawz?pnref=story>). Retrieved (02/10/2015)

Sofi, Farsat, the KDP parliamentarian
(<https://www.facebook.com/farsatsofi/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (20/07/2015).

Taha, Mohammad Ali, the KDP parliamentarian
(<https://www.facebook.com/MohammedaliYaseenTaha/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (21/08/2015).

Talabani, Jalal, Facebook pages:
(<https://www.facebook.com/mam.jalal2011/?fref=ts>),
(<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jalal-Talabani/108370732520502?fref=ts>). Retrieved (17/12/2015).

Talabani, Qubad, the member of PUK leadership council and deputy prime minister of KRG, Facebook:
(<https://www.facebook.com/qubadtalabaniofficial/?fref=ts>), Twitter:
(<https://twitter.com/qubadjt>), YouTube:
(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcZCImI0JBx7WPqZaoLkxcA>). Retrieved (20/11/2015)

We are KIU (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/emayekgrtwin/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (07/10/2015).

We are KIU and we succeed (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/groups/712032122191101/>). Retrieved (07/10/2015).

Yaketi Ayindaya – PUK is future (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/YaketiAyndaya/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (08/10/2015)

Yaketi Nishtimani – union patriotic (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/Yaketi-Nishtimani-124065621113629/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (11/11/2015).

Yaketiw Khabati Sakht – PUK and difficult strife (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/YktyWKhbatySkht/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (05/10/2015).

Yaketiw Mardayati – PUK and Braveness (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/mamekurdd/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (08/10/2015).

Youth of KIU (Facebook group)
(<https://www.facebook.com/lawany.yakgrtuy.islamy/?fref=ts>). Retrieved (27/02/2016).

2. Secondary Resources

Abdulla, M. (2012, December 29). PUK should free itself from KDP domination. Retrieved April 14, 2015, from The Kurdistan Tribune: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2012/puk-should-free-itself-from-kdp-domination/>

Abdulrahman, K. (2007, December 4). Guide: Iraq's Kurdish media. Retrieved April 22, 2015, from BBC News: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7094973.stm

Abrams, S. (2005). Web 2.0—Huh? Library 2.0, Librarian. *Information Outlook*, 9 (12), 44-45.

Adams, P. (2009). *Geographies of Media and Communication*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Aday, S., Farrell, H., Lynch, M., Sides, J., Kelly, J., and Zuckerman, E. (2010, August). Blogs and Bullets New Media in Contentious Politics. Retrieved July 8, 2016, from Unites Sttes Institute of Peace: <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/pw65.pdf>

Aelst, P. V., and Walgrave, S. (2004). New media, new movements? The role of the internet in shaping the 'anti-globalization' movement. In W. v. Donk, B. D. Loader, P. G. Nixon, and D. Rucht, *Cyberprotest New media, citizens and social movements* (pp. 87-119). New York, USA: Routledge.

Ahmad, N. and Popa, I. L., 2014. The Social Media Usage and the Transformation of Political Marketing and Campaigning of the Emerging Democracy in Indonesia Case Study of the 2012 Gubernatorial Election of the Special Region of the Capital City Jakarta. In: Social Media in Politics Case Studies on the Political Power. Bacau: Springer, pp. 97-125.

Ahmad, Z. (2011, December 29). Iraqi Kurdistan 2011: a year of demonstration and political debate. Retrieved April 30, 2015, from niqash / politics: <http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=2962>

Ahmed, H. (2012, October 1). Strategic PUK-KDP agreement is needed now more than ever: senior PUK official. Retrieved April 14, 2015, from Ekurd Daily: <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/10/state6529.htm>

Ahmed, H., 2014. PUK Reluctant to Abolish 'Strategic Agreement' With KDP. [Online] Available at: <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/02062014> [Accessed 30 9 2015].

Ahmed, M. M. (2012). Iraqi Kurds and Nation-Building. New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ahmed, Z. (2012, February 16). renewed protests by kurdish? not if facebook is the 'new tahrir square. Retrieved May 16, 2015, from Niqash: <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/society/2996/renewed-protests-by-kurdish-not-if-facebook-is-the-%E2%80%99new-tahrir-square%E2%80%99.htm>

Al-Tamimi, A. J. (2011, July 2011). Iraqi Kurdistan: the mythical 'Other Iraq'. Retrieved April 30, 2015, from The Kurdistan Tribune: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2011/iraqi-kurdistan-mythical-other-iraq/>

Alaaldin, R. (2010, May 13). Death of Kurdish journalist must be explained. Retrieved April 20, 2015, from The Guardian: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/may/13/zardasht-osman-death-kurdistan>

Albirini, A. (2008). The Internet in the developing countries: a medium of economic, cultural and political domination. *International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication technology* , 4 (1), 57.

Ali, O. (2013, December 3). Goran movement and the future of Iraqi Kurdistan: the emerging crisis in Northern Iraq. Retrieved April 22, 2015, from Todays Zaman: http://www.todayszaman.com/op-ed_Goran-movement-and-the-future-of-iraqi-kurdistan-the-emerging-crisis-in-northern-iraq-by-othman-ali-_333011.html

Alkadiri, R. (2015, September 15). Kurdistan's Missed Chance for Reform. Retrieved February 27, 2017 from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=61286>

Alterman, J. B. (1998). *New Media, New Politics? From Satellite Television to the Internet in the Arab World*. Washington, USA: Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Anduiza, E., Jensen, M. J., and Jorba, L. (2012). *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide A Comparative Study*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Angell, O. I., and Angell, I. (2000). *The New Barbarian Manifesto: How to Survive the Information Age*. London: Kogan Page.

Anstead, N., and Chadwick, A. (2009). Parties, election campaigning, and the internet Toward a comparative institutional approach. In A. Chadwick, and P. N. Howard, *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics* (pp. 56-71). New York, USA: Routledge.

Aragonès, E., and Pagés, S. S. (2005, March). A Model of Participatory Democracy: Understanding the Case of Porto Alegre. Retrieved October 19, 2016, from <http://adres.ens.fr/IMG/pdf/14112005.pdf>

Awena. (2014, September 7). Qairanakani harem Opozisioni peshu baraw pashiman bunawa la hukumat dabat (the KR regions crisis push former oppositions to leave the government). Retrieved April 25, 2015, from Awena newspaper: <http://www.awene.com/article/2014/09/07/35521>

Awlla, D. M. (2013, December 24). Patriotic union of Kurdistan between legitimation of election and green territory. Retrieved April 23, 2015, from Ekurd Daily: <http://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2013/12/state7597.htm>.

Backer, B., and Wehner, J. (2001). Electronic Networks and Civil Society: Reflections on Struchtural Changes in the Public Sphere. In C. Ess, and C. Ess (Ed.), *Culture, Technology, Communication Towards an Intercultural Global Village* (pp. 67-85). New York, USA: State University of New York Press.

Bakhtyar, M. (2015, Janury 10). Birawari Amro (Todays Memory). Retrieved March 4, 2016, from Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Mala.Bakhtiar/?fref=ts>

Bamarny, K. (2012, February 15). Kurdistan needs an independent judiciary . Retrieved April 21, 2015, from The Kurdistan Tribune: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2012/kurdistan-needs-independent-judiciary/>

Barakovic, V. (2011). Facebook Revolutions: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Social Analysis* , 1 (2), 194-205.

Barber, B. R. (1984). *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*. California: University of California Press.

Barberá, P., 2014. How Social Media Reduces Mass Political Polarization..
[Online]
Available at: <http://smapp.nyu.edu/papers/SocialMediaReduces.pdf>
[Accessed 19 October 2015].

Barlow, A. (2007). *The Rise of the Blogosphere*. London: Praeger .

Baumgartner, J. C., and Morris, J. S. (2010). MyFaceTube Politics: Social Networking Web Sites and Political Engagement of Young Adults. *Social Science Computer Review* , 28 (1), 24-44.

Bayraktutan, G., Binark, M., Comu, T., Dog̃u, B., Islamoglu, G., and Aydemir, A. T. (2014). The Use of Facebook by Political Parties and Leaders in the 2011 Turkish General Elections Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis. In B. Pařrut, and M. Pařrut, *Social Media in Politics* (pp. 165-199). Bacau: Springer.

BBC News. (2003, January 13). Profile: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Retrieved February 17, 2016, from BBC News: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/not_in_website/syndication/monitoring/media_reports/2588601.stm

BBC News. (2011, April 19). Timeline: Iraqi Kurds. Retrieved February 17, 2016, from BBC News: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/country_profiles/2893067.stm

BBC, 2014. Iraqi Kurdistan profile - Media. [Online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-28211544> [Accessed 3 11 2015].

BBC. (1991, March). Saddams Iraq: Key Events. Retrieved February 25, 2015, from BBC News: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/02/iraq_events/html/uprisings.stm

BBC. (2013, October 2). Iraqi Kurdistan opposition party beats PUK in elections. Retrieved April 22, 2015, from BBC News: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24362864>

BBG. (2015, March). Media Use in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. Retrieved May 7, 2015, from Broadcasting Board of Governors: <http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2015/03/Iraq-brief-FINAL.pdf>

Becker, B., and Wehner, J. (2001). Electronic Networks and Civil Society: Reflections on Structural Changes in the Public Sphere. In C. Ess (Ed.), *Culture, Technology, Communication Towards an Intercultural Global Village* (pp. 67-68). New York, USA: State University of New York Press.

Benkler, Y., 2006. *The wealth of networks. How social production transforms markets and freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bennet, W. L. (2011). *News: the Politics of Illusion*. New York, USA: Longman.

Bennet, W. L., and Segerberg, A. (2012). Digital media and the personalization of collective action – social technology and the organization of protests against the global economic crisis. In B. D. Loader, and D. Mercea, *Social media and democracy*. Oxon: Routledge.

Bennett, W. L., and Segerberg, A. (2012). The Logic of Connective Action Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication and Society* , 15 (5), 739-768.

Bennett, W. L., Breunig, C., and Givens, T. (2008). Communication and Political Mobilization: Digital Media and the Organization of Anti-Iraq War Demonstrations in the U.S. *Political Communication* , 25 (3), 269-289.

Berger, J. and Milkman, K. . L., 2010. Social Transmission, Emotion, and the Virality of Online Content, *Punsilvania: s.n*.

Berman, S. (2007). The Vain Hope for "Correct" Timing. *Journal of Democracy* , 18 (3), 14-17.

Best, M. L., and Wade, K. W. (2009). The Internet and Democracy Global Catalyst or Democratic Dud? *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society* , 29 (4), 255-271.

Bevern, S. (2015). Party Communication in Routine Times of Politics Issue Dynamics, Party Competition, Agenda-Setting, and Representation in Germany. Mannheim,: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.

Bimber, B. (2001). Information and Political Engagement in America: the search for effects of information technology at the individual level. *Political Research Quarterly* , 54 (1), 53-67.

Bimber, B. (2003). *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bimber, B., and Davis, R. (2003). *Campaigning Online: The Internet in U.S. Elections*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bimber, B., Flanagin, A. J., and Stohl, C. (2005). Reconceptualizing Collective Action in the Contemporary Media Environment. *Communication Theory* , 15 (4), 365-388.

Bimber, B., Stohl, C., and Flanagin, A. J. (2009). Technological Change and the Shifting Nature of Political organizations. In A. Chadwick, P. N. Howard, A. Chadwick, and P. N. Howard (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics* (First ed., pp. 72-86). New York, USA: Routledge.

Bismarck, H. v. (2013). *British Policy in the Persian Gulf, 1961–1968 Conceptions of Informal Empire*. New YorkUSA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bode , L., and Dalrymple, K. E. (2015). Politics in 140 Characters or Less: Campaign Communication, Network Interaction, and Political Participation on Twitter. *Journal of Political Marketing* , 1-22.

Bogaards, M. (2009). How to classify hybrid regimes? Defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism. *Democratization* , 16 (2), 399-423.

Bohnen, J., and Kallmorgen, J.-F. (2009, July/August). How Web 2.0 is Changing Politics Just voting is no longer enough. Technology is empowering a new civil society. Retrieved January 24, 2015, from Atlantische Initiative: http://www.atlanticcommunity.org/app/webroot/files/articlepdf/Web_2.0_Change_Politics.PDF

Borah, P. (2014). Facebook Use in the 2012 USA Presidential Campaign Obama vs. Romney. In B. Pařrut, and M. Pařrut, *Social Media in Politics Case Studies on the Political Power of Social Media* (pp. 201-211). New York: Springer.

Breuera, A., Landman, T., and Farquhar, D. (2014). Social media and protest mobilization: evidence from the Tunisian revolution. *Democratization* , 21 (1).

Browne, M. A. (2003). The United Nations Security Council – Its Role in the Iraq Crisis: A Brief Overview. Congressional Research Service.

Browning, G. (2002). *Electronic Democracy: Using the Internet to Transform American Politics*. New Jersey, USA: CyberAge Books.

Bruinessen, M. V. (1992). *Agha, Shaikh and State The Social and Political structures of Kurdistan*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd.

Brundidge, J., and Rice, R. E. (2009). Political engagement online Do the information rich get richer and the like-minded more similar? In A. Chadwick, and P. N. Howard, *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics* (pp. 144-156). New York, USA: Routledge.

Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second life, and Beyond : from production to produsage*. New York: Peter Lang.

Bruns, A. and Burgess, J., (2011). #ausvotes How twitter covered the 2010 Australian federal election. *Communication, Politics and Culture*, 44(2), pp. 37-56.

Bruns, A. and Highfield, T., (2013). Political Networking on Twitter Tweeting the Queensland state election. *Information, Communication and Society*, 16(5), pp. 667-691.

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Budge, I. (1996). *New Challenge of Direct Democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Byrne, D. N. (2007). Public Discourse, Community Concerns, and Civic Engagement: Exploring Black Social Networking Traditions on BlackPlanet.com. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* , 13 (1), 319-340.

Cabras, A. (2002). Beyond the Internet: Democracy on the Phone? In M. J. Mazarr, and M. J. Mazarr (Ed.), *Information Technology and World Politics* (pp. 85-99). New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Calderaro, A. (2014). Internet Politics Beyond the Digital Divide A Comparative Perspective on Political Parties Online Across Political Systems. In C. G. Reddick, *Social Media in Politics Case Studies on the Political Power of Social Media* (pp. 3-17). London, UK: Springer.

Cameron, F. (2005). *US Foreign Policy after the Cold War Global hegemon or reluctant sheriff?* . New York: Routledge.

Cantijoch, M. (2012). Digital Media and Offline Political Participation in Spain. In E. Anduiza, M. J. Jensen, and L. Jorba (Eds.), *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide A Comparative Study* (pp. 80-101). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cardoso, G., and Neto, P. P. (2004). Mass media driven mobilization and online protest ICTs and the pro-East Timor movement in Portugal. In W. v. Donk, B. D. Loader, P. G. Nixon, and D. Rucht, *Cyberprotest New media, citizens and social movements* (pp. 129- 144). New York, USA: Routledge.

Carlson, T., and Strandberg, K. (2012). The Rise of Web Campaigning in Finland. In R. L. Fox, and J. M. Ramos, *iPolitics Citizens, Elections, and Governing in the New Media Era* (pp. 125-150). New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Carothers , T. (1999). *Aiding Democracy Abroad*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Carothers (b), T. (2007). Misunderstanding Gradualism. *Journal of Democracy* , 18 (3), 18-22.

Carothers, T. (2007). How Democracies Emerge The "Sequencing Fallacy. *Journal of Democracy* , 18 (1), 12-27.

Carthew, A. (2010). Thaksin's Twitter revolution — How the Red Shirts protests increase the use of social media in Thailand. In P. Behnke, *Social Media and*

Politics Online Social Networking and Political Communication in Asia (pp. 23-38). Singapore: the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Casper, G. (1995). *Fragile Democracies: The Legacies of Authoritarian Rule*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Castells, M. (2009). *Communication Power*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.

Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of Outrage and and Hope Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Chadwick, A. (2006). *Interent Politics States, Citizens, and New Communication Technologies*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.

Chadwick, A. (2007). Digital network Repertoires and organizational Hybridity. *Political Communication* , 24 (3), 281-301.

Chambers, S. (1996). *Reasonable democracy: Jürgen Habermas and the politics of discourse*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Chen, P. (2012). Adoption and use of digital media in election campaigns: Australia, Canada and New Zealand. *Public Communication Review* , 1 (1), 3-26.

Cho, A. (2007). An introduction to mashups for health librarians. *Journal of the Canadian Health Librarians Association* , 28 (1), 19-22.

Chomani (a), K. (2013, April 27). The leadership crises in Kurdish political parties. Retrieved April 16, 2015, from The Kurdistan tribune: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2013/leadership-crisis-kurdish-political-parties/>

Chomani (a), K. (2014, August 1). Independent media fades in Iraqi Kurdistan. Retrieved April 22, 2015, from Almonitor the Pulse of the Middle East: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/iraq-kurdistan-free-independent-media-krgrudaw.html#>

Chomani (b), K. (2013, August 28). Iraqi Kurdistan Elections Could Be Turning Point. Retrieved April 23, 2015, from Almonitor - the Pulse of the Middle East: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/kurdistan-politics-election-scenarios.html#>

Chomani (b), K. (2014, September 2014). The challenges facing Goran to change. Retrieved April 22, 2015, from Kurdish Policy Foundation: <http://kurdishpolicy.org/2014/09/05/the-challenges-facing-Goran-to-change/>

Chomani (c), K. (2013, September 28). Iraqi Kurdistan's historic election. Retrieved April 23, 2015, from Foreign Policy: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/09/28/iraqi-kurdistan-historic-election/>

Chomani, K. (2011, May 23). The end of the pretence of Kurdish democracy. Retrieved May 3, 2015, from Ekurd Daily: <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2011/5/state5120.htm>

Chomani, K. (2012, April 5). What Barham Salih didn't do. Retrieved April 1, 2015, from the Kurdistan Tribune: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2012/what-barham-salih-didnt-do/>

Chomani, K. (2014, August 1). *Independent media fades in Iraqi Kurdistan*. (K. Chomani, Producer) Retrieved November 9, 2014, from Almonitor: <http://www.almonitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/iraq-kurdistan-free-independent-media-krgr-rudaw.html>

Chomani, K. (2014, January 10). Freedom of the Press at a Crossroads in Iraqi Kurdistan. Retrieved April 21, 2015, from Jadaliyya: <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/15974/freedom-of-the-press-at-a-crossroads-in-iraqi-kurd>

Chomani, K., 2015. Let's Fix It. [Online] Available at: <http://pasewan.com/blog/2015/lets-fix-it/> [Accessed 9 October 2015].

Chua, A. (1998, October). Markets, Democracy, and Ethnicity: Toward a New Paradigm for Law and Development. *Yale Law Journal* , 341.

Clark, E. (2012). Social Movements and Social Media A qualitative study of Occupy Wall Street. School of Culture and Communication. Södertörn University .

Clark, K. (2008, January 2008). Corruption in Iraqi Kurdistan. Retrieved April 19, 2015, from BBC: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/crossing_continents/7178820.stm

CNN. (2011, April 17). Kurdistan: 81 protesters wounded. Retrieved April 29, 2015, from CNN iReport : <http://ireport.cnn.com/docs/DOC-592314>

CNN. (2015, October 28). Jalal Talabani Fast Facts. Retrieved February 17, 2016, from CNN: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/01/04/world/meast/jalal-talabani---fast-facts/>

Coleman, S., and Blumler, J. G. (2009). *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship Theory, Practice and Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Colombo, C., Galais, C., and Gallego, A. (2012). Internet Use and political attitudes in Europe. In E. Anduiza, M. J. Jensen, and L. Jorba, *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide A Comparative Study* (pp. 102- 118). New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Cormode, G., and Krishnamurthy, B. (2008, June). Retrieved January 13, 2015, from Free-Reviewed Journal of the Internet:
<http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2125/1972#author>

Crigler, A., Just, M., Hume, L., Mills, J., and Hevron, P. (2012). YouTube and TV Advertising Campaigns Obama versus McCain in 2008. In R. L. Fox, and J. M. Ramos, *ipolitics Citizens, Elections, and Governing in the New Media Era* (pp. 103-124). New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Curran, J. (2011). *Media and Democracy*. Oxon: Routledge.

Curran, J., Fenton, N. and Freedman, D., (2012). *Misunderstanding the Internet*. New York: Routledge.

D'heer, E., and Verdegem, P. (2014). An Intermedia Understanding of the Networked Twitter Ecology The 2012 Local Elections in Belgium. In B. Parut, and M. Patrut, *Social Media in Politics Case Studies on the Political Power of Social Media* (p. 82). Bacau, Romania: Springer.

Dahl, R. (1989). *On Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dahl, R. A. (1977). *Polyarchy: participation and opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dahlberg, L. (2001). The internet and democratic discourse: Exploring the prospects of online deliberative forums extending the public sphere. *Information, Communication and Society* , 4 (4), 615-633.

Dahlberg, L., and Siapera, E. (2007). Introduction: Tracing radical democracy and the internet. In L. Dahlberg, and E. Siapera, *Radical democracy and the internet*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dalton, R. J. (2004). *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices*. New York, USA: Oxford University press.

Danly, J. (2009, July 23). The 2009 Kurdish Elections. Retrieved April 16, 2015, from Institute for the Study of War Military Analysis and Education for Civilian Leaders: <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/KurdishElections.pdf>

Davis, R. (1999). *The Web of Politics the Internets Impact on the American Political System*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.

Davis, R. (2009). *Typing Politics* . New York: Oxford University Press.

Davis, R., Baumgartner, J. C., Francia,, P. L., and Morris, J. S. (2009). The internet in U.S. election campaigns. In A. Chadwick, and P. N. Howard, *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics* (pp. 13-14). New York: Routledge.

Defronzo, J. (2010). *The Iraqi War Origins and Consequences*. Philadelphia, USA: Westview Press.

Della Porta, D., & Keating, M. (2008). How many approaches in the social sciences? An epistemological introduction. In D. Della Porta, & M. Keating, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences A Pluralist Perspective* (pp. 19-39). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Della Porta, D., and Diani, M. (2006). *Social Movements an introduction*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Demirhan, K. (2014). Social Media Effects on the Gezi Park Movement in Turkey: Politics Under Hashtags. In B. Pařrut, and M. Pařrut, *Social Media in Politics Case Studies on the Political Power of Social Media* (pp. 281-314). Bacau: Springer International Publishing.

Denscombe, M. (2014). *The Good Research Guide For Small-scale Social Research Projects*. Berkshire, UK: Open University Press.

Denton Jr , R. E., and Kuypers, J. A. (2008). *Politics and Communication in America: Campaigns, Media, and Governing in the 21st Century*. Long Grove: Waveland Press.

Denton, R. E., and Woodward, G. C. (1990). *Political communication in America*. New York, USA: Praeger.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2003). Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 1-29). California: Sage Publication.

Dhuddi, T. (2010). Social websites' political benefits still far-off in Pakistan. In P. Behnke, *Social Media and Politics Online Social Networking and Political Communication in Asia* (pp. 87-96). Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Diamond, L. J. (2002). Thinking About Hybrid Regimes. *Journal of Democracy* , 13, 21-35.

Diani, M. (2001). Socail movement networks Virtual and real. In F. Webster, and F. Webster (Ed.), *Culture and Politics in the Information Age a New politics?* (pp. 118-120). New York, USA: Routledge.

Donk, W. v., Loader, B. D., Nixon, P. G., and Rucht, D. (2004). Introduction Social movements and ICTs. In W. v. Donk, B. D. Loader, P. G. Nixon, and D. Rucht, *Cyberprotest New media, citizens and social movements* (pp. 1-21). New York: Routledge.

Duman, B. (2013, July 28). Extension of Barzani's presidential term and its impact on politics. Retrieved March 2, 2016, from Todays Zaman:

http://www.todayszaman.com/orsam_extension-of-barzanis-presidential-term-and-its-impact-on-politics_321928.html

Dutton, W. H. (2009). The Fifth Estate Emerging through the Network of Networks. *Prometheus* , 27 (1), 1-15.

Dyn Research. (2014, 07 22). Kurdish ISPs enable growth of Iraqi Internet. Retrieved 11 11, 2016, from Dyn Research: <http://research.dyn.com/2014/07/growth-iraqi-internet-come-north/>

Eaton, T. (2013). Internet Activism and The Egyptian Uprisings: Transforming online Dissent into The Offline World . *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* , 9 (2), 5-24.

Edgerly, S., Bode, L., Kim, Y. M., and Shah, D. V. (2013). Campaigns Go Social Are Facebook, YouTube and Twitter Changing Elections? In T. N. Ridout, *New Directions in Media and Politics* (pp. 82-99). New York: Routledge.

Ekurd daily. (2013, 01 30). Internet service providers ISPs in Iraqi Kurdistan . Retrieved 11 11, 2016, from Ekurd Daily: <http://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2013/1/state6824.htm>

Ekurd Daily. (2015, 8 24). Shivan Azad, a Kurdish man who criticized Iraqi Kurdistan govt released on bail. Retrieved 8 6, 2017, from Ekurd Daily: <http://ekurd.net/shivan-azad-criticized-krg-released-bail-2015-08-24>

Ekurd Daily. (2015, October 12). Iraqi Kurdistan parliament speaker prevented from entering Erbil. Retrieved February 2, 2016, from Ekurd Daily: <http://ekurd.net/kurdistan-parlt-speaker-prevented-2015-10-12>

El-Nawawy, M., and Khamis, S. (2013). *Egyptian Revolution 2.0 Political Blogging, Civic Engagement, and Citizen Journalism*. New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Elster, J. (1998). Introduction. In J. Elster, *Deliberative Democracy* (pp. 1-28). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Eltantawy, N., and Wiest, J. B. (2011). Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory. *International Journal of Communication* , 5, 1207-1224.

Eminky, J. (2015, 8 18). Dwa Halwesti Parti Lasar Prsi Sarokayati Harem (the KDP Final position on regional presidency issue. (K. Osman, Interviewer) NRT.

Enli, G. S., and Skogerbø, E. (2013). Personalized Campaigns in Party-Centred Politics Twitter and Facebook as arenas for political communication. *Information, Communication and Society* , 16 (5), 757-774.

Erkmen, S., 2013. Kurdistan Regional Government parliamentary election results and the KRG's future. [Online]
Available at: http://www.todayszaman.com/orsam_kurdistan-regional-government-parliamentary-election-results-and-the-krgs-future_328113.html
[Accessed 9 October 2015].

Fadaee, S. (2012). *Social Movements in Iran Environmentalism and civil society*. New York, USA: Routledge.

Faris, D. M., and Rahimi, B. (2015). Introduction. In D. M. Faris, and B. Rahimi, *Social Media in Iran* (pp. 1-18). New York: State University of New York Press.

Fatah, S. (2012, October 1). Strategic Agreement between PUK and KDP. Retrieved February 17, 2016, from Orsam: <http://orsam.org.tr/en/showArticle.aspx?ID=1925>

Fenton, N., and Barassi, V. (2011). Alternative Media and Social Networking Sites: The Politics of Individuation and Political Participation. *The Communication Review*, 14 (3), 179-196.

Ferejohn, J. (2004). External and internal explanation. In I. Shapiro, R. M. Smith, & T. E. Masoud, *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Finer, J. (2005, December 14). For Kurds, A Surge Of Violence In Campaign. Retrieved 12 23, 2015, from The Washington Post: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/13/AR2005121302119.html?nav=rss_print/asection

Fitzpatrick, P. (2012, October 19). Positivism vs Interpretivist approach. Retrieved June 6, 2016, from Edinburgh Napier Research Module: <https://fitzpt1.wordpress.com/2012/10/19/positivism-vs-interpretivist-approach/>

Flanagin, A. J., and Metzger, M. J. (2008). Digital Media and Youth: Unparalleled Opportunity and Unprecedented Responsibility. In M. J. Metzger, and A. J. Flanagin, *Digital Media, Youth, and Credibility* (pp. 5-27). Cambridge: MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning.

Fox, R. L., and Ramos, J. M. (2012). *iPolitics Citizens, Elections, and Governing in the New Media Era*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Frazer, M. (2011, June 6). Iraqi Kurdistan govt. institutions still under political party patronage . Retrieved April 14, 2015, from Ekurd Daily: <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2011/6/state5171.htm>

Friesen, B. K. (2010). *Designing and Conducting Your First Interview Project*. San Francisco, USA: Jossey-Bass.

- Fuchs, C. (2008). *Internet and Society* (First ed.). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Fuchs, C. (2015). Power in the Age of Social Media. *Heathwood Journal of Critical Theory* , 1 (1), 1-23.
- Fukuyama, F. (2007). Liberalism versus State-Building. *Journal of Democracy* , 18 (3), 10-13.
- Fukuyama, F. (2011). *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Gainous, J., and Wagner, K. M. (2014). *Tweeting to Power: The Social Media Revolution in American Politics*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Galley,, J. S. (2000). On-line Interaction and Why Candidates Avoid It. *Journal of Communication* , 50 (4), 111-132.
- Gandhi, J., and Okar, E. L. (2009). Elections Under Authoritarianism. *Annual Review of Political Science* , 12, 403-424.
- Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the streets: Social media and contemporary activism* . London: Pluto Press.
- Ghannam, J. (2011). *Social Media in the Arab World: Leading up to the Uprisings of 2011*. Center for International Media Assistance. Washington, D.C: Center for International Media Assistance, and National Endowment for Democracy Supporting Freedom around the world.
- Gibson, R. K., Newell, J. L., and Ward, S. J. (2000). New Parties, New Media: Italian Party Politics and the Internet . *South European Society and Politics* , 5 (1), 123-142.
- Gibson, R., and Ward, S. (2003). Letting the daylight in? Australian parties' use of the World Wide Web at the state and territory level. In R. Gibson, P. Nixon, and S. Ward, *Political Parties and the Internet Net gain?* (pp. 139-160). New York, USA: Routledge.
- Gibson, R., and Ward, S. (2009). Parties in the digital age - a review article. *Representation* , 45 (1), 87-100.
- Gimmler, A. (2001). Deliberative democracy, the public sphere and the internet. *Philosophy and Social Criticism* , 27 (4), 21-39.
- Glassman, M. E., Straus, J. R., and Shogan, C. J. (2010). Social Networking and Constituent Communications: Member Use of Twitter During a Two-Month Period in the 111th Congress . *Journal of Communication Research* , 2 (2-3), 219-233.

Gordon , M. R., and Callimachi, R. (2015, November 12). Kurds Retake Strategic Highway in Iraq's North From ISIS. Retrieved February 4, 2016, from The New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/13/world/middleeast/sinjar-isis-iraq-syria.html>

Gould, C. C. (1989). *Rethinking democracy: Freedom and social cooperation in politics, economy and society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Graber, D. A. (1981). 'Political Language',. In D. D. Nimmo, and K. R. Sanders, *Handbook of Political Communication* (pp. 195-223). Beverly Hills : Sage Publications.

Graber, D. A. (2010). *Processing Politics: Learning from Television in the Internet Age*. Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press.

Graham, T., Broersma, M., Hazelhoff, K., and van 't Haar, G. (2013). Between Broadcasting Political Message and Interacting with Voters The use of Twitter during the 2010 UK general election campaign. *Information, Communication and Society* , 16 (5), 692-716.

Grant, W. J., Moon, B., and Grant, J. B. (2010). Digital Dialogue? Australian Politicians' use of the Social Network Tool Twitter. *Australian Journal of Political Science* , 45 (4), 579-604.

Grigsby, E. (2012). *Analyzing Politics An Introduction to political Science*. Belmont, USA: Cengage Learning.

Groshek, J. (2009). The Democratic Effects of the Internet, 1994—2003 A Cross-National Inquiry of 152 Countries. *International Communication Gazette* , 71 (3), 115-136.

Groshek, J., and Dimitrova, D. (2011). A Cross-Section of Voter Learning, Campaign Interest and Intention to Vote in the 2008 American Election: Did Web 2.0 Matter? *Studies in Communication* , 9, 355-375.

Grossman, L. K. (1995). *Electronic Republic: Reshaping American Democracy for the Information Age*. New York, USA: Penguin Group.

Grugel, J. (2002). *Democratization A Critical Introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gueorguieva, V. (2008). Voters, MySpace, and YouTube The Impact of Alternative Communication Channels on the 2006 Election Cycle and Beyond. *Social Science Computer Review* , 26 (3), 288-300.

Gulati, G. J., and Williams, C. B. (2010). Congressional candidates' use of YouTube in 2008: Its frequency and rationale. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* , 7 (2-3), 93-109.

Gunter, M. M. (1996). The KDP-PUK Conflict in Northern Iraq. *The Middle East Journal* , 50 (2), 225 -241.

Gunter, M. M. (1998). Turkey and Iran Face off in Kurdistan. *The Middle East Quarterly* , 5 (1), 33-40.

Gunther, R., and Diamond, L. (2003). Species of Political Parties A New Typology. *Party Politics* , 9 (2), 167-199.

Gutmann, A., and Thompson, D. (1996). *Democracy and disagreement: Why moral conflict cannot be avoided in politics, and what should be done about it.* Cambridge: Belknap Press.

Habermas, J. (1991). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.* Massachusetts: The MIT Press, Cambridge.

Habermas, J. (1996). *Between Facts and Norms Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* . Cambridge, USA: The MIT Press.

Hague, B. N., and Loader, B. D. (1999). *Digital Democracy Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age.* New York: Routledge.

Hague, R., and Harrop, M. (2004). *Comparative Government and Politics* (6th Edition ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Harlow, S. (2012). Social media and social movements: Facebook and an online Guatemalan justice movement that moved offline. *New Media and Society* , 14 (2), 225-243.

Harris, W. (2015, August 1). Chaos in Iraq: Are the Kurds Truly Set to Win? Retrieved March 15, 2015, from Small Wars Foundation: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/chaos-in-iraq-are-the-kurds-truly-set-towin>

Harrison, G. (2002). Globalization. In G. Blakeley, and V. Bryson, *Contemporary Political Concepts A Critical Introduction* (pp. 14-34). London, UK: Pluto Press.

Hars, S. (2016, october 2). Is Iraqi Kurdistan a model for democracy? Retrieved 8 4, 2017, from Kurd Daily: <http://ekurd.net/kurdistan-model-democracy-2016-10-02>

Hassan, K. (2015, October 28). Kurdistan's Democracy on the Brink. Retrieved February 27, 2017 from Foreign Policy: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/28/kurdistans-democracy-on-the-brink/>

Hauser, G. A. (1999). *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres.* Columbia : University of South Carolina Press.

Haynes, J. (2012). Introduction: Thirty-five years of democratization: the third and fourth waves of democracy in perspective. In J. Haynes, *Routledge Handbook of Democratization* (pp. 1-9). New York: Routledge.

Haynes, J. (2012). *Routledge Handbook of Democratization*. New York: Routledge.

Healy, J., and Schmidt, M. S. (2011, February 25). Demonstrations Turn Violent in Iraq. Retrieved April 27, 2015, from The New York Times: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/26/world/middleeast/26iraq.html?_r=0

Heidar, K., and Saglie, J. (2003). Predestined Parties? Organizational Change in Norwegian Political Parties. *Party Politics* , 9 (2), 219-239.

Hendricks, J. A., and Denton, Jr, R. E. (2010). Political Campaigns and Communicating with the Electorate in the Twenty-First Century. In J. A. Hendricks, and R. E. Denton, Jr., *Communicatorin- Chief How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House*. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books.

Héritier, A. (2008). Causal explanation. In D. della Porta, & M. Keating, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences* (pp. 61-79). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hermans , L., and Vergeer, M. (2012). Personalization in e-campaigning: A crossnational comparison of personalization strategies used on candidate websites of 17 countries in EP elections 2009. *New Media and Society* , 15 (1), 72-92.

Hermans , L., and Vergeer, M. (2012). Personalization in e-campaigning: A crossnational comparison of personalization strategies used on candidate websites of 17 countries in EP elections 2009. *New Media and Society* , 15 (1), 72-92.

Herrera, L., and Sakr, R. (2014). *Wired Citizenship Youth Learning and Activism in the Middle East*. New York: Routledge.

Highfield, T. (2016). *Social Media and Everyday Politics*. Cambridge: Polity.

Hill, D. T., and Sen, K. (2002). Netizens in combat: conflict on the internet in Indonesia. *Asian Studies Review* , 26 (2), 165- 187.

Hindman, M. (2009). *The Myth of Digital Democracy*. New jersey: Princeton University Press.

Hisso, M. K. (2008). *Developments in Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkish-Iraqi Relations 1990-2005*. Erbil, Kurdistan: Aras Press.

Hlidkova, A. (2011, April 27). Media under fire in Iraqi Kurdistan. Retrieved May 14, 2015, from Doha Centre for Media Freedom: <http://www.dc4mf.org/en/content/media-under-fire-iraqi-kurdistan>

Hogan , J., and Trumpbour , J. (2013). *The Press and Political Processes in Contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan* . Electronic, Erbil.

Howard, P. N. (2010). *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy Information technology and Political Islam*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.

Howard, P. N., Agarwal, S. D., and Hussain, M. M. (2011). When Do States Disconnect Their Digital Networks? Regime Responses to the Political Uses of Social Media. *The Communication Review* , 14 (3), 216-232.

Howard, P. N., and Hussain, M. M. (2012). Egypt and Tunisia: The Role of Digital Media. In L. Diamond, and M. F. Plattner, *Liberation Technology Social Media and the Struggle for Democracy* (pp. 110-123). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Howard, P. N., and Hussain, M. M. (2013). *Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press.

Hudson, W. E. (2017). *American Democracy in Peril: Eight Challenges to America's Future* (8th Edition ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publication.

Hughes, R. (2002). Fujimori Meets Cabinas Publicas: The Internet, Journalism, and Democracy in Peru. In M. J. Mazarr, and M. J. Mazarr (Ed.), *Information Technology and World Politics* (pp. 71-83). New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Human Rights Watch (a). (2011, April 21). Iraq: Widening Crackdown on Protests. Retrieved May 15, 2015, from Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/04/21/iraq-widening-crackdown-protests>

Human Rights Watch (b). (2011, March 7). Iraqi Kurdistan: Prevent Attacks on Protesters Security Forces Watch Assault on Sulaimaniya Demonstrators. Retrieved May 18, 2015, from Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2011/03/07/iraqi-kurdistan-prevent-attacks-protesters>

Human Rights Watch. (2010, October 29). Iraqi Kurdistan: Journalists Under Threat Ensure Open, Thorough Investigation Into Killing of Young Reporter. Retrieved March 8, 2016, from Human Rights watch: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/10/29/iraqi-kurdistan-journalists-under-threat>

Human Rights Watch. (2013, February 10). Iraqi Kurdistan: Free Speech Under Attack. Retrieved April 21, 2015, from Human Rights Watch: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/02/09/iraqi-kurdistan-free-speech-under-attack>

Huntington , S. P., and Nelson, J. M. (1976). *No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Internews Europe. (2012). *The Internet and Freedom of Expression in Iraq*. London: Internews Europe and UNESCO.

Invest in Group. (2015, January 15). *Overview: Kurdistan Region of Iraq*. Retrieved January 15, 2015, from Invest in Group:
<http://www.investingroup.org/publications/kurdistan/overview/diplomacy-politics/>

Invest in Group. (2015, January 29). *Overview: Kurdistan Telecom*. Retrieved January 29, 2015, from Invest in Group:
<http://www.investingroup.org/publications/kurdistan/overview/telecom/>

Ishiyama, J. T. (2012). *Comparative Politics Principles of Democracy and Democratization*. Chichester: Blackwell Publishing.

Iyengar, S., Hahn, K. S., Krosnick, J. A., and Walker, J. (2008). Selective Exposure to Campaign Communication: The Role of Anticipated Agreement and Issue Public Membership. *The Journal of Politics* , 75 (1), 186-200.

Jackson, N. A., and Lilleker, D. G. (2009). Building an Architecture of Participation? Political Parties and Web 2.0 in Britain. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* , 6 (3-4), 232-250.

Jacobs, K., and Spierings, N. (2016). *Social Media, Political Parties, and Political Inequalities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jamal, D. (2011, April). Uprising in Iraqi Kurdistan on the fight for freedom in Kurdistan. Retrieved May 14, 2015, from Red Pepper:
<http://www.redpepper.org.uk/uprising-in-iraqi-kurdistan/>

Jensen, M. J., and Anduiza, E. (2012). Online Political Participation in the United States and Spain. In E. Anduiza, M. J. Jensen, and L. Jorba, *Digital media and Political Engagement Worldwide A Comparative Study* (pp. 80-101). new York, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, T. J., and Perlmutter, D. D. (2011). Introduction: The Facebook Election. In T. J. Johnson, and D. D. Perlmutter, *New Media, Campaigning and the 2008 Facebook Election* (pp. 1-7). New York: Routledge.

Johnston, H. (2011). *States and Social Movements*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Jorba, L., and Bimber, B. (2012). The Impact of Digital Media on Citizenship from a Global Perspective. In E. Anduiza, M. J. Jensen, and L. Jorba, *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide A Comparative Study* (pp. 16-38). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Joseph, S. (2012, January 1). Social Media, Political Change, and Human Rights. *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* , 35 (1), pp. 145-188.

Jundyany, A. (2016, February 6). Facebook. Retrieved March 4, 2016, from Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Azad.Jndyany/?fref=ts>

Kadir, R. M. (2007). *La penaw Kurdistaneki Nweda* (in order for a new Kurdistan). Erbil, Iraq: Mnara Press.

Kalnes, Ø. (2009). Norwegian Parties and Web 2.0 . *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* , 6 (3-4), 251-266.

Kamal, A. (2014, March 28). Azmuni Regay parlamany w trawilkay gorani dasalat (the experience of parliament and the road to change power). Retrieved April 30, 2015, from Amro (Today): <http://www.emrro.com/ezmuniregay.htm>

Kaplan, A. M., and Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Bussiness Horizons* , 53 (1), 59-68.

Karda, W. (2011, February 21). Kurdistan and the Blame Game. Retrieved April 30, 2015, from Kurdistan Commentary: <https://kurdistancommentary.wordpress.com/2011/02/21/kurdistan-and-the-blame-game/>

Karem, H., and Chomani (b), K. (2015, February 21). Regulating the Media in Kurdistan: Mission Impossible or Ignorable? Retrieved April 21, 2015, from The Kurdistan Tribune: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2015/regulating-the-media-in-kurdistan-mission-impossible-or-ignorable/>

Katz, J. E., Barris, M., and Jain, A. (2013). *The Social Media President Barack Obama and the Politics of Digital Engagement*. New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Katzman, K. (2010). The Kurds in Post-Saddam Iraq. US Congress. Washington DC: Congressional Research Service.

Khalil, L. (2009). Stability in Iraqi Kurdistan: Reality or Mirage? The Saban Center for Middle East Policy The Brookings Institution. Doha: The Saban Center for Middle East.

Khondker, H. H. (2011). Role of the New Media in the Arab Spring . *Globalizations* , 8 (5), 675-679.

Kissane, D. (2010). A Tale of Two Campaigns: A Comparative Assessment of the Internet in French and US Presidential Elections. Central European University Conference in the Social Sciences. Budapest.

Kitschelt, H., and Rehm, P. (2011). Political Participation. In D. Caramani, *Comparative Politics* (pp. 331-351). New York: Oxford University Press.

Klinger, U., 2013. Mastering the Art of Social Media. *Information, Communication and Society*, June, 16(5), pp. 717-736.

KNN. (2014, February 17). Calender of February 17 (17 Shubat), 2011 Martyrs in the Kurdistan Region. Retrieved April 29, 2015, from Kurdish News Network: <http://knn.net/en/full-story-18902-28-False#.VUCvNK1Viko>

Koc-Michalska, K., Gibson, R., and Vedel, T. (2014). Online Campaigning in France, 2007–2012: Political Actors and Citizens in the Aftermath of the Web.2.0 Evolution. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* , 11 (2), 220-244.

Kriesi, H. (2008). Political Mobilisation, Political Participation and the Power of the Vote. *West European Politics* , 31 (1-2).

Kumar, R. (2011). *Research Methodology a Step-by Step Guide for Beginners* (3 ed.). London, UK: SAGE Publication Ltd.

Kurdish Policy Foundation. (2014, September 2). Growing public grievances in Kurdistan will lead to civil disobedience. Retrieved April 22, 2015, from Kurdish Policy Foundation: <http://kurdishpolicy.org/2014/09/02/growing-public-grievances-in-kurdistan-will-lead-to-civil-disobedience/>

Kurdish Views. (2011, March 8). Unrest in Kurdistan. Retrieved April 29, 2015, from Kurdish Views: <http://www.kurdishviews.com/2011/03/unrest-in-kurdistan.html>

Kurdistan News. (2012). Amadakari bo Rozhi 17i Shubbat Dakret (Preparation is ongoing for the 17th of February). Retrieved May 16, 2015, from Kurdistan News: <http://www.knewsdaily.org/Direje.aspx?Jimare=820>

Kurdistan Parliament, 2015. Kurdistan Parliament. [Online] Available at: <http://www.perlemanikurdistan.com/Default.aspx?page=pageandc=Parliament-History1992> [Accessed 5 October 2015].

Kurdistan Parliament. (2014). The History of Elections. Retrieved February 27, 2015, from Kurdistan Parliament: <http://www.perlemanikurdistan.com/Default.aspx?page=pageandc=Parliament-History>

Kurdistan Regional Government, 2015. the Kurdistan Parliament. [Online] Available at: <http://cabinet.gov.krd/p/p.aspx?l=12andp=229> [Accessed 30 September 2015].

Kurdistan Regional Government. (2009, August 8). Electoral Commission announces final results of Kurdistan Region elections. Retrieved January 22, 2015, from KRG:

<http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?r=223andl=12ands=02010100anda=30895ands=010000>

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews an Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London, UK: SAGE Publication Ltd.

Kwon, K. H., Nam, Y., and Lackaff, D. (2011). Wireless Protesters Move Around: Informational and Coordinative Use of Information and Communication Technologies for Protest Politics. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* , 8 (4), 383-398.

Lachapelle, G., and Maarek, P. J. (2015). New Technologies: Helping Political Parties and the Democratic Process or Threatening Them? In G. Lachapelle , and P. J. Maarek, *Political Parties in the digital Age the Impact of New Technologies in Politics* (pp. 1-6). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH.

Larémont, R. R. (2014). Revolution, revolt, and reform in North Africa. In R. R. Larémont, *Revolution, Revolt, and Reform in North Africa The Arab Spring and Beyond* (pp. 1-14). New York: Routledge.

Leezenberg, M. (2005). Iraqi Kurdistan: contours of a post-civil war society. *Third World Quarterly* , 26 (4-5), 631-647.

Lesaca, J. (2015, November 19). Fight against ISIS reveals power of social media. Retrieved June 2, 2016, from Brookings:
<http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/techtank/posts/2015/11/19-isis-social-media-power-lesaca>

Letargo, J. E. (2010). FaceBook and Twitter Democratizing Participation in the Philippines. In P. Behnke, *Social Media and Politics Online Social Networking and Political Communication in Asia* (pp. 11-23). Singapore: the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Levitsky, S., & Way, A. L. (2010). *Competitive Authoritarianism Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lilleker, D. G. (2006). *Key Concepts in Political Communication*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Lilleker, D. G. (2011). *Political Campaign, elections and the Internet*. New York: Routledge.

Lilleker, D. G., and Jackson, N. A. (2010). Towards a More Participatory Style of Election Campaigning: The Impact of Web 2.0 on the UK 2010 General Election. *Policy and Internet* , 2 (3), 69-98.

Lim, M. (2012). Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004–2011. *Journal of Communication* , 62 (2), 231- 248.

Linz, J. J., and Stepan, A. (1996). Problems of democratic transition and consolidation : southern Europe, South America, and post-communist Europe . Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lipset, S. M. (1959). Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy. *The American Political Science Review* , 53 (1), 69-105.

Loader, B. D., Vromen, A. and Xenos, M. A., 2014. Introduction: The Networked Young Citizen Social Media, Political Participation and Civic Engagement. In: Introduction: The Networked Young Citizen Social Media, Political Participation and Civic Engagement. New York: Routledge, pp. 1-13.

Löfgren, K., and Smith, C. (2003). Political parties and democracy in the information age. In R. Gibson, P. Nixon, and S. Ward, *Political Parties and the Internet* (pp. 39-52). New york: Routledge.

Long, J. M. (2004). *Saddam's War of Wards Politics, Religion and the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait*. Austin, USA: University of Texas Press.

Lopes, A. R. (2014, 1 4). The Impact of Social Media on Social Movements: The New Opportunity and Mobilizing Structure. Retrieved June 29, 2016, from https://www.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/CCAS/departments/PoliticalScience/Journal_of_Political_Research__JPR_/2014_JSP_papers/Lopes_JPR.pdf

Loudon, M., and Mazumdar, B. T. (2013). Media representations of technology in Egypt's 2011 pro-democracy protests. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* , 34 (1), 50-67.

Lusoli, W., and Ward, S. (2006). Hunting protestors Mobilization, participation adn protest online in the Countryside Allaince. In S. Oates, D. Owen, R. K. Gibson, S. Oates, D. Owen, and R. K. Gibson (Eds.), *The Internet and Politics* (pp. 52-71). New York, USA: Routledge.

Macintosh, A. (2004). Characterizing E-participation in policy-making. *Proceedings of the 37th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*.

MacKinnon, R. (2012). Chinas "Networked Authoritarianism". In L. Diamond, and M. F. Plattner, *Liberation Technology Social Media and the Struggle for Demcoracy* (pp. 78-92). Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Mackinnon, R. (2012). *Consent of the networked the Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom*. New York, USA: Basic Books.

Mahmoud, R. (2011). The Outlooks for the Opposition in Iraq's Kurdistan Region. Doha: ArabCenter for Research and Policy Studies.

Mäkinen, M., and Kuira, M. W. (2008). Social Media and Postelection Crisis in Kenya. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* , 13 (3), 328-335.

Makovsky, A. (1998, September 29). Policy Watch 341 Kurdish Agreement Signals New U.S. Commitment. Retrieved March 18, 2015, from The Washington Institute: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/kurdish-agreement-signals-new-u.s.-commitment>

Mansfield, E. D., & Snyder, J. L. (2005). *Electing To Fight Why Emerging Democracies Go To War*. London: MIT Press.

Mansfield, E. D., & Snyder, J. L. (2007). The sequencing "Fallacy". *Journal of Democracy* , 18 (3), 5-10.

March, L. (2004). Russian Parties and the Political Internet. *Europe-Asia Studies* , 56 (3), 369-400.

Margetts, H. (2001). The Cyber Party. 'The Causes and Consequences of Organisational Innovation in European Political Parties - Workshop. Grenoble,: ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops.

Margetts, H. (2006). Cyber Parties. In R. S. Katz, and W. Crotty, *Handbook of Party Politics* (pp. 528-536). London: SAGE PUblication Ltd.

Margolis, M., and Resnick, D. (2000). *Politics as Usual: The Cyberspace 'Revolution'*,. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Margolis, M., and Riaño, G. M. (2009). *The Prospect of Internet Democracy*. Surrey,: Ashgate.

Margolis, M., Resnick, D., and Levy, J. (2003). Major parties dominate, minor parties struggle US elections and the Internet. In R. Gibson, P. Nixon, and S. Ward, *Political Parties and the Internet Net gain?* (pp. 98-119). New York, USA: Routledge.

Margolis, M., Resnick, D., and Wolfe, J. D. (1999). Party Competition on the Internet in the United States and Britain. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* , 4 (4), 24-47.

Maroof, R., 2013. Elections campaign and Slander. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Rabun-Maroof-135202556677269/?fref=ts>
[Accessed 9 11 2015].

Matthews, K. (1993). *The Gulf Conflict and International Relations*. New York, USA: Routledge.

McCallum, F. (2011). Religious Diaspora and Information Communication Technology: The Impact of Globalization on Communal Relations in Egypt. In M. Zweiri, and E. C. Murphy, *The New Arab media Technology, Image and perception* (pp. 81-103). Bairut , Lebanon: Ithaca Press.

McDowall, D. (2004). *A Modern History of the Kurds*. New York, USA: I.B. Tauris.

Mendelberg, T., and Oleske, J. (2000). Race and Public Deliberation. *Political Communication* , 17, 169-191.

Metro Center. (2013, October 31). 61 Journalists file complaints with Metro Center during Elections. Retrieved April 21, 2015, from Metro Center Journalist rights and Advocacy: <http://metroo.org/english/dreja.aspx?hewalandjmare=8andJor=3>

Mhamad, A. A., 2015. Election Campaigns in Kurdistan, Iraq – The Lengths Politicians Go For Votes. [Online] Available at: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2014/election-campaigns-kurdistan-iraq-lengths-politicians-go-for-votes/> [Accessed 11 October 2015].

Michaelsen, M. (2011). *New Media vs. Old Politics The Internet, Social Media, and Democratisation in Pakistan*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Berlin: fesmedia Asia.

Millet. (2015, April 19). Reason Behind Stealing April Issues of Kurdish Lvin Magazine in Erbil Revealed. Retrieved April 22, 2015, from Millet: http://www.milletpress.com/english/en_news/post_detail.php?id=1393

Mills, R. (2016). *Under the Mountains: Kurdish Oil and Regional Politics* . Dubai: The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.

Mocan, R., Badescu, G., and Marian, C. (2003). The democratising potential of the Internet and political parties in Romania. In R. Gibson, P. Nixon, and S. Ward, *Political Parties and the Internet Net gain?* (pp. 161- 174). New York, USA: Routledge.

Mohammad, F. (2013, October 18). ParchaKrdary Dasalat u Shksti Prozhakani Goran (Government reations and the failure of Goran Projects. Retrieved April 23, 2015, from Aga Press: <http://www.agapress.net/page.php?id=3046>.

Mohammad, S. (2014, July 20). Tawanek babe szadani tawanbarakan (a crime with out punishing the perpetrators). Retrieved April 20, 2015, from Sharpres: <http://www.sharpress.net/Direje.aspx?Jimare=19127>

Møller, J., & Skaaning, S. E. (2013). *Democracy and Democratization in Comparative Perspective Conceptions, conjunctures, causes, and consequences*. New York: Routledge.

Møller, J., and Skaaning, S. E. (2013). *Democracy and Democratization in Comparative Perspective* Conceptions, conjunctures, causes, and consequences. New York: Routledge.

Moore, R. K. (1999). Democracy and cyberspace. In B. N. Hague, and B. D. Loader, *Digital Democracy Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age* (pp. 39-60). New York: Routledge.

Moradkhin, F. (2011, April 21). The Middle East Uprisings and the Specificities of the Events in South Kurdistan. Retrieved April 30, 2015, from The Kurdistan Tribune: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2011/kurdistan-south-the-middle-east-uprisings-and-the-specificities-of-the-events-in-kurdistan/>

Morlino, L. (2004). What is a 'Good' Democracy? *Democratization* , 11 (5), 10-32.

Morozov, E. (2011). *The Net Delusion The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York: Public Affairs .

Morozov, E. (2012). Whither Internet Control? In L. Diamond, and M. F. Plattner, *Liberation Technology Social Media and the Struggle for Democracy* (pp. 47-62). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Morris, D. (1999). *Vote.com HOe big-money lobbysys and the media are loosig thier influence and the Internet is giving power back to the people*. California, USA: Renaissance Books.

Mufid, A. (2014, November 22). Does the KRG economy need a stronger Iraq or a stronger Kurdistan? Retrieved April 20, 2015, from The Kurdistan Tribune: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2014/does-krgeconomy-need-stronger-iraq-or-stronger-kurdistan/>

Murphy, E. C. (2011). Between Image and Reality: New ICTs and The Arab Public Sphere. In M. Zweiri, E. C. Murphy, M. Zweiri, and E. C. Murphy (Eds.), *Arab Media Technology, Image and Perception* (First ed., pp. 103-120). Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

Musiani, F., 2014. Avant-garde Digital Movement or "Digital Sublime Rhetoric? The Movimento 5 Stelle and the 2013 Italian Parliamentary Elections. In: *Social Media in Politics*. Bacau: Springer, pp. 127-141.

Mustafah , R., 2014. The changing face of political communication. [Online] Available at: <http://kurdishpolicy.org/2014/07/14/the-changing-face-of-political-communication/> [Accessed 14 July 2015].

Mustafah, R. (2015, December 5). How social media enhances Kurdish democracy. Retrieved February 4, 2016, from Al-Arabyia English:

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/life-style/entertainment/2016/02/03/Should-Beyonc-and-Coldplay-be-accused-of-cultural-appropriation-.html>

Myres, M. D. (2009). *Qualitative Research in Business and Management*. London, UK: SAGE Publication.

Natali, D. (2010). *The Kurdish Quasi-State development and dependency in the Post-Gulf War Iraq*. New York, USA: Syracuse University Press.

Natali, D. (2014, May 5). Iraqi Kurdish parties court Islamists. Retrieved 12 23, 2015, from Almonitor the Pulse of the Middle: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/05/iraq-kurdish-parties-court-islamists.html#>

Natali, D. (2017, January 3). Is Iraqi Kurdistan heading toward civil war? Retrieved February 27, 2017 from Al-monitor: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/01/kurdistan-civil-war-iraq-krg-sulaimaniya-pkk-mosul-kurds.html>

National Democratic Institute (NDI), 2013. Iraq Election Watch: KRG Parliamentary elections. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI-Iraq-Election-Watch-Ed7.pdf>
[Accessed 9 October 2015].

Nederman , C. J., Jones, B. S., and Fitzgerald, L. (1998). Lost in cyberspace: Democratic prospects of computer-mediated communication. *Contemporary Politics* , 4 (1), 9-22.

Neurink, J. (2016, 4 25). The Kurds in the cyber warfare against ISIS. Retrieved June 2, 2016, from Rudaw: <http://rudaw.net/english/opinion/25042016>

Nie, N. H., and Erbring, L. (2009). *Interent and Society: A Preliminary Report*. *IT and Society* , 1 (1), 275-283.

Noam, E. M. (2005). Why the Internet is bad for democracy. *Communications of the ACM - The digital society* , 48 (10), 57-58.

Norris, P. (2001). *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide*. New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Norris, P. (2002). *Democratic Phoenix Reinventing Political Activism*. New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Norris, P. (2003). Preaching to the Converted? Pluralism, Participation and Party Websites. *Party Politics* , 9 (1), 21-24.

Norris, P. (2005). *Political Parties and Democracy in Theoretical and Practical Perspectives Developments in party Communications*. Washington: The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

Norris, P. (2006). Did the Media Matter? Agenda-Setting, Persuasion and Mobilization Effects in the British General Election Campaign. *British Politics* , 1 (2), 195-221.

Norris, P., 2011. Political Communication. In: *Comparative Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 352-370.

Noveck, B. S. (2000). Paradoxical Partners: Electronic Communication and Electronic Democracy. In P. Ferdinand, *The Internet, Democracy, and Democratization* (pp. 18-34). London: Frank Cass.

NRT. (2015, August 21). Du jar bir bkawa (Think Twice). Retrieved January 24, 2016, from NRT: <http://www.nrttv.com/media-show-ep.aspx?Jimare=13andT>

NRT. (2015, December 7). Yakgrtu lasar bali islah chi dale? (what does the KIU say about Islah wing? Retrieved January 26, 2016, from NRT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JvSICMzFf5Q>

NRT. (2016, February 29). Raport. Retrieved February 29, 2016, from Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=>

NRT. (2016, February 6). Sbayne Komitay kara krdnaway Hkumatu parlamen ko dabetawa (Tomorrow the committee to activate parliament and government will meet). Retrieved February 13, 2016, from NRT: <http://www.nrttv.com/Details.aspx?Jimare=28203>

NRT. (2016, January 6). Nakokyakani Yaketi Nishtimani Baraw Kwe (PUK internal conflicts - from where to where). Retrieved February 27, 2016, from Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/naliatv/?fref=nf>

Nuche.net. (2011, March 16). Talabani Namayak Arastay Anjumani Saray Azadi Dakat (Talabani Sends a Letter to the temporary council of Platform of freedom. Retrieved May 3, 2015, from Nuche Net: <http://www.nuche.net/?p=824>

O'Brien, R. (2000). *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

O'Donnell, G. A. (2001). Democracy, Law, and Comparative Politics. *Studies in Comparative International Development* , 36 (1), 7-36.

O'Loughlin, B. (2001). The Political Implications Of Digital Innovations: Trade-offs of democracy and liberty in the developed world. *Information, Communication and Society* , 4 (4), 595-614.

Okar, E. L. (2005). *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Onley, J. (2009). Britain and the Gulf Shaikhdoms, 1820–1971: The Politics of Protection. Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar. Qatar: Center for International and Regional Studies.

Orsam. (2013). *Democracy Process and Problems in Iraqi Kurdistan*. Ankara: Orsam.

Osman, M. (2001, 5 1). The Washington agreement, the negotiations, the implementation and its prospects. Retrieved March 18, 2015, from Kurdish Media: <http://kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=8013>

Ottaway, M. (2003). *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Pařrut, B., and Pařrut, M. (2014). Social Media in Politics Case Studies on the Political Power of Social Media. New York: Springer.

Papacharissi, Z., and Oliveira, M. (2012). Affective News and Networked Publics: The Rhythms of News Storytelling on #Egypt. *Journal of Communication* , 62 (2), 266-282.

Park, R. E. (1967). n social control and collective behavior: selected papers. Chicago, USA: The University of Chicago Press.

Pasek, J. e., and Romer, D. (2009). Realizing the Social Internet? Online Social Networking Meets Offline Civic Engagement. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* , 6 (3-4), 197-215.

Pateman, C. (1970). Participation and Democratic Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Perlof, R. M. (2014). The Dynamics of Political Communication: Media and Politics in a Digital Age. New York, USA: Routledge.

Perloff, R. M. (2014). The Dynamics of Political Communication Media and Politics in a digital Age. New York: Routledge.

Pintor, R. L., and Morlino, L. (2003). Italy and Spain. The Quality of Democracy: Improvement or Subversion?’, Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law and European Forum (pp. 1-44). Standford: Stanford Institute for International Studies.

Poell, T., Abdulla, R., Rieder, B., Woltering, R., and Zack, L. (2016). Protest leadership in the age of social media. *Information, Communication and Society* , 19 (7), 994-1014.

Posusney, M. P. (2002). Multi-Party Elections in the Arab World: Institutional Engineering and Oppositional Strategies. *Studies in Comparative International Development* , 36 (4), 34-62.

Posusney, M. P. (2004). Enduring Authoritarianism Middle East Lessons for Comparative Theory. *Comparative Politics* , 36 (2), 127-138.

Powell, B. G. (2003). On Democratic Responsiveness. *The Quality of Democracy: Improvement or Subversion?* Stanford: Stanford University .

Powell, T. E., and Renner, M. (2003). *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. Retrieved 2014, from [http://learningstore.uwex.edu: http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/g3658-12.pdf](http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/g3658-12.pdf)

Pring, . C., 2015. Anti corruption Resource Center. [Online] Available at: www.u4.no/publications/kurdistan-region-of-iraq-overview.../3868 [Accessed 1 11 2015].

Prior, M. (2007). *Post-Broadcast Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Qadir, K. (2015, February 14). Kuzhanaway Chaxmaxay raparini 17y shubbat w hokarakani (extinction the sparks of 17th Feb uprisings and its factors. Retrieved April 30, 2015, from Pegay Rohi Sardam: <http://www.pegey-rohi-serdem.ch/index/?p=650>

Qadir, K. S. (2007). Iraqi Kurdistan's Downward Spiral. *The Middle East Quarterly* , 14 (3), 19-26.

Qiang, X. (2012). the Battle for the Chinese Internet. In L. Diamond, and M. F. Plattner, *Liberation technology Social Media and the Struggle for Democracy* (pp. 63-77). Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press.

Quinn, S. (2010). Hip or hype? Twitter and Australia's 2010 federal election. In P. Behnke, *Social Media and Politics Online Social Networking and Political Communication in Asia* (pp. 67-77). Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Quinn, S., and Lamble, S. (2008). *Online newsgathering research and reporting for journalism*. New York: Elsevier.

Ragas, M. W., and Kiouisis, S. (2011). Intermedia Agenda-Setting and Political Activism: MoveOn.org and the 2008 Presidential Election. In T. J. Johnson, and D. D. Perlmutter, *New Media, Campaigning and the 2008 Facebook Election* (pp. 7-30). New York: Routledge.

Rahimi, B. (2011). The Agonistic Social Media: Cyberspace in the Formation of Dissent and Consolidation of State Power in Postelection Iran. *The Communication Review* , 14 (3), 158-178.

Rajput, H. (2014). Social Media and Politics in India: A Study on Twitter Usage among Indian Political Leaders. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* , 2 (1), 63-69.

Rauf, M. (2014). 17y Shubbat Lekolinawayaki Balganamayii Barawrdkaryia (17th of February A documentary and Comparative Study. Slemani, Kurdistan Region: Lvin Co.

Rauf, M. (2015, February 17). 17y Shubbat la Newan Dwene w Amroda (the 17th February Between Yesterday and Tommorrow . Retrieved April 29, 2015, from Lvin Press: <http://lvinpress.com/dreja.aspx?hewalandjmare=17777andJor=22>

Rawnsley, G. D. (2005). Political Communication and Democracy. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Reddick, C. G., and Aikins, S. K. (2012). Web 2.0 Technologies and Democratic Governance Political, Policy and Management Implications. New York: Springer.

Reporters without Borders. (3013). Between Freedom and abuses: The Media Paradox in Iraqi Kurdistan . Retrieved April 2015, 2015, from Reporters without Borders: http://en.rsfs.org/IMG/pdf/rsf_rapport_kurdistan_irakien_nov_2010_gb.pdf

Riker, W. H. (1988). Liberalism against populism : a confrontation between the theory of democracy and the theory of social choice. New York: Waveland Press.

Romano, D. (2006). The Kurdish Nationalist Movement Opportunity, Mobilization, and Identity. New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Romano, D., and Gurses, M. (2014). Introduction: The Kurds as Barrier or Key to Democratization. In D. Romano, and M. Gurses, Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria (pp. 1-14). New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rommele, Andrea. (2003). Political Parties Party Communication and Information and communication technologies. *Party Politics*, 9(1), 7-20.

Rudaw (c). (2016, March 5). ragawandrawi yaketi w parti labaray kobunawakay pirmam (the PUK-KDP announcement about Pirmam meeting). Retrieved March 8, 2016, from Rudaw: <http://rudaw.net/NewsDetails.aspx?pageid=199437>

Rudaw Youtube. (2015, October 6). Ashty Harwami is a great Liar in the Kurdish History. Retrieved March 4, 2016, from YouTube Rudaw: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsobjwyzgGw>

Rudaw, 2013. With Ranj (Lagal Ranj). [Online]
Available at: http://rudaw.net/sorani/onair/tv/episodes/episode/lagal_ranj_28072013_h4
[Accessed 3 11 2015].

Rudaw. (2013, September 26). Aref Qurbani: Tanya la 30i huzairan dangi yaketi la 30% kami Krdwa (Aref Qurbani: on 30 June, PUK voted reduced by 15%). Retrieved February 20, 2016, from Rudaw: <http://rudaw.net/sorani/kurdistan/260920134>

Rudaw. (2014, 1 2). Kurdistan Islamic Union Distances itself from Muslim Brotherhood. Retrieved 12 24, 2015, from Rudaw: <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/02012014>

Rudaw. (2015, October 10). Teenager dies after protesterstorch KDP headquarters. Retrieved 3 30, 2017, from Rudaw : <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/101020152>

Rudaw. (2016, 2 16). Parti la baray mucha walami abadi dadatawa (The KDP responded to Al-Abbadi regarding wages). Retrieved 3 4, 2016, from Rudaw: <http://rudaw.net/sorani/business/160220162>

Rudaw. (2016, February 13). Yakgrtw la komitay kara krdnaway parlamn u hukumat ksgayawa (KIU dithdrew from reactivating parliament and cabinet committee). Retrieved February 13, 2016, from Rudaw: <http://rudaw.net/NewsDetails.aspx?pageid=194104>

Rudaw. (2016, March 6). Khalk chon la kobunawakay yakety w parti darwann? (How do citizens look at the KDP-PUK meeting? Retrieved March 8, 2016, from Rudaw: <http://rudaw.net/sorani/kurdistan/060320167?keyword=%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%95%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C%20%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%88>

Rudaw. (2016, March 7). Party w Yaketi dastayaki Nwe bo Sarokayati parlamen dyari dakan (PUK and KDP determine anew head of parliament). Retrieved March 8, 2016, from Rudaw: <http://rudaw.net/sorani/kurdistan/07032016>

Rudaw. (2017, 1 15). Striking teachers in Sulaimani and Halabja say they suspend the strike. Retrieved 3 30, 2017, from Rudaw: <http://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/150120173>

Sabadello, M. (2011). The Role of New Media for the Democratization Processes in the Arab World. Retrieved from The Role of New Media for the Democratization Processes in the Arab World: <http://projectdanube.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/The-Role-of-New-Media-for-the-Democratization-Processes-in-the-Arab-World.pdf>

Sadiq, Y. M. (2016, January 15). Taw u Twe (discussion). (K. Osman, Interviewer) NRT Satellite TV.

Salamey, I., and Pearson, F. S. (2012). The Collapse of Middle Eastern Authoritarianism: breaking the barriers of fear and power. *Third World Quarterly*, 33 (5), 931-948.

Salgado, S. (2014). *The Internet and Democracy Building in Lusophone African Countries*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Salih , M. A. (2015, August 18). Iraqi Kurds in limbo over president's fate. Retrieved January 24, 2016, from Al Jazeera: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/08/iraqi-kurds-limbo-president-fate-150818080100886.html>

Salih, B. (2012, February 16). Havday Shubat (17 of February). Retrieved April 3, 2017, from Voice of America (VOA): <http://blogs.voanews.com/kurdish/balensalih/2012/02/16>

Salih, M. A. (2011, February 17). IRAQ: Protests Spread to Kurdistan. Retrieved April 29, 2015, from Inter Press Service: <http://www.ipsnews.net/2011/02/iraq-protests-spread-to-kurdistan/>

Samad, R. (2011, March 9). Mtmna ba Kabinay Dktor Barham Salh Drayawa (Beham Salih Cabinet regained the trust). Retrieved May 1, 2015, from Xendan: <http://xendan.org/old/dreja2b.aspx?hewalandjmara=22563>

Sartori, G. (1987). *The theory of democracy revisited Part (Vol. 1 and 2)*. London: Chatham House.

Sbeiy (a). (2011, February 2011). Rawandi Kurdi la Almanya Pshtiwni bo Xopishandanakani Kurdistan Ragayand (Kurdish Diaspora in Germany Supports the protests in Iraqi Kurdistan). Retrieved May 3, 2015, from Sbeiy: http://www.sbeiy.com/%28S%28enjxnm05f3hun34qbe4g1%29%29/ku/Dosya_Rozhnama_detail.aspx?ArticleID=842andCatID=21andCat=dosya.

Sbeiy (b). (2011, March 12). Swid: Ba bazhdari Cahndin Kasayati Khopishandan bo sarkhstni Slemani Saz dakre) Sweeden: Many personalities participate ina gathering to Suport Sulaymanya. Retrieved May 3, 2015, from Sbeiy: http://www.sbeiy.com/%28S%28j1hmyz1rhbxuxosefdc5f12g%29%29/ku/Dosya_Rozhnama_detail.aspx?ArticleID=1157andCatID=21andCat=dosya

Schmidt, E., and Cohen, J. (2013). *The New Digital Age Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business*. London: John Murray .

Schneider, C. Q., and Schmitter, P. C. (2004). Liberalization, transition and consolidation: measuring the components of democratization. *Democratization* , 11 (5), 59-90.

Schumpeter, J. A. (1994). *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. New York: Routledge.

Segerberg, A., and Bennett, W. L. (2011). Social Media and the Organization of Collective Action: Using Twitter to Explore the Ecologies of Two Climate Change Protests. *The Communication Review* , 14 (3), 197-215.

Semetko, H. A. (2006). Parties in the Media Age. In R. S. Katz, Handbook of Party Politics (pp. 515-546). London: SAGE Publications.

Shah, D. V., Kwak, N., and Holbert, R. L. (2001). "Connecting" and "Disconnecting" With Civic Life: Patterns of Internet Use and the Production. *Political Communication* , 18 (2), 141- 161.

Shapiro, I. (2003). The State of Democratic Thoery. New Jersy: Princeton University Press.

Sheyholislami, J. (2011). *Kurdish Identity, Discourse, and New Media*. New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Shirky, C. (2008). Here Comes Everybody the Power of Organizing without Organization. London: Penguin Books.

Shirky, C. (2011). The Political Power of Social media. *Foreign Affairs* , 28-41.

Shulman, S. W. (2009). The Case Against Mass E-mails: Perverse Incentives and Low Quality Public Participation in U.S. Federal Rulemaking. *Policy and Internet* , 1 (1), 23-53.

Sieb, P. M. (2008). The Al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media Are Reshapping World Politics. Washington: Potomac Books.

Singer, J. B. (2014). User-generated visibility: Secondary gatekeeping in a shared media space. *New Media and Society* , 16 (1), 55-73.

Skovsgaard, M. and Dalen, A. V., 2013. Dodging the Gatekeeper Social media in the campaign mix during. *Information, Communication and Society*, 15(5), pp. 737-756.

Smelser, N. J., and Baltes, P. B. (2001). International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences. New York: Elsevier.

Smith, M. (2014, November 26). Iraq's Internet Is Almost All Under Kurdish Control. Retrieved May 6, 2015, from The World Post: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/26/iraq-internet-kurds_n_6224556.html

Speakman, B. (2015). Interactivity and Political Communicaion: New Media Tools and thier impact on Public Political Communication. *Journal of Media Critiques* , 1 (1), 131-144.

Speda . (2016, January 3). Waziri Karaba dasti la kar keshayawa (minister of electricity resigned). Retrieved January 10, 2016, from Speda: <http://www.speda-tv.net/new/news/kurdistan/9644>

Spinner, M. (2011). The Effects of Social Media on Democratization. Master Thesis . New York, USA: City University of New York - CUNY Academic Work.

Stansfield, G. R. (2001, September 19). Iraqi Kurdistan: an Analysis and Assessment of the Development and Operation of the Political System. UK: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies - University of Durham.

Stansfield, G. R. (2003). *Iraqi Kurdistan Political development and emergent democracy*. New York, USA: Routledge.

Stansfield, G., and Anderson, L. (2009). Kurdish in Iraq: The struggle Between Baghdad and Erbil. *Middle East Policy Council* , 16 (1), 134- 145.

Stansfield,, G. (2006). Kurdistan-Iraq: Can the Unified Regional Government Work. *Arab Reform Bulletin* , 4 (5).

Stieglitz, S., and Xuan, L. D. (2013). Social Media and Democratization: a social media analytics framework. *Social Network Analysis and Mining* , 3 (4), 1277-1291.

Stoker, G. (2006). Why Politics Matter Making Democracy Work. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Suiter, J. (2015). Political Campaigns and Social Media: A Study of #mhe13 in Ireland. *Irish Political Studies* , 30 (2), 299-309.

Sunstein, C. R. (2001). Republic.com. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Tai, Z. (2006). *The internet in China: Cyberspace and civil society*. New York: Routledge.

Talabani, Q. (2011, January 2011). Kurdistan is not Tunisia. Retrieved April 28, 2015, from Qubada Blog: <http://qubadsblog.com/2011/01/kurdistan-is-not-tunisia/>

Tang, M., Jorba, L., and Jensen, M. J. (2012). Digital media and political attitudes in China. In E. Anduiza, M. J. Jensen, and L. Jorba, *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide A Comparative Study* (pp. 221-239). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Teorell, J. (2006). Political participation and three theories of democracy: A research inventory and agenda. *European Journal of Political Research* , 45 (5), 787-810.

Tewksbury, D. (2003). What do Americans Really Want to Know? Tracking the Behavior of News Readers on the Internet. *Journal of Communication* , 53 (4), 569-748.

Tewksbury, David; Rittenberg, Jason. (2012). News on the Internet Information and Citizenship in the 21st Century. New York: Oxford University Press.

The Independent High Electoral Commission, 2014. Kurdistan Parliamentary Election 2013. [Online] Available at: <http://www.ihec.iq/ar/index.php/elections-kurd2013.html> [Accessed 30 September 2015].

the Journal of Turkish Weekly, 2015. KRG debates extension of Barzani's mandate. [Online] Available at: <http://www.turkishweekly.net/2015/07/30/news/krg-debates-extension-of-barzanis-mandate/> [Accessed 9 October 2015].

The Kurdish Globe. (2014, October 20). KDP and PUK resolve disputes by reviewing their strategic agreement. Retrieved April 14, 2015, from The Kurdish Globe: <https://www.kurdishglobe.net/article/AA4BB5BD16ED0F2EC620A1CFD1258F1B/KDP-and-PUK-resolve-disputes-by-reviewing-their-strategic-agreement-.html>

The Kurdish Project. (2015). Goran Movement for Change. Retrieved February 17, 2016, from the Kurdish Project: <http://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-nationalism/Goran-movement-for-change/>

The Kurdish Project. (2015). PUK: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Retrieved February 17, 2016, from the Kurdish Project: <http://thekurdishproject.org/history-and-culture/kurdish-nationalism/puk-patriotic-union-of-kurdistan/>

The Kurdistan tribune. (2011, December 25). 5 KDP members jailed for burning KIU office. Retrieved April 21, 2015, from The Kurdistan Tribune: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2012/kdp-members-jailed-for-burning-kiu-office/>

The Kurdistan Tribune. (2013, December 6). Anti-corruption Kurdish journalist Kawa Garmanyani murdered. Retrieved April 20, 2015, from the Kurdistan Tribune: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2013/anticorruption-kurdish-journalist-kawa-garmyani-murdered/>

The Kurdistan Tribune. (2014, March 5). SPECIAL REPORT: Kurdistan's 'natural resources' and reputation damaged by corruption. Retrieved April 20, 2015, from The Kurdistan Tribune: <http://kurdistantribune.com/2014/special-report-kurdistans-natural-resources-reputation-damaged-by-corruption/>

The United Nation. (1991). Security Council Resolution. Retrieved February 25, 2015, from the United Nations: <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/1991/scres91.htm>

Tolbert, C. J., and Mcneal, R. S. (2003). Unraveling the Effects of the Internet on Political Participation? *Political Research Quarterly* , 56 (2), 175-185.

Tomàs , N., and Villellas, A. (2009). The Kurdistan Autonomous Region: risks and challenges for peace . Bellaterra : Peacebuilding Papers School for a Culture of Peace.

Towner, T. L. (2012). Campaigns and Elections in a Web 2.0 World: Uses, Effects, and Implications for Democracy. In C. G. Reddick, and S. K. Aikins, Web 2.0

Technologies and Democratic Governance Political, Policy and Management Implications (pp. 185-199). New York: Springer.

Trippi, J. (2004). *the revolution will not be televised democracy the internet and the overthrow of everything*. New York, USA: Regan Books.

Tufekci, Z. (2014). Social Movements and Governments in the Digital Age: Evaluating a Complex Landscape . *Journal of International Affairs* , 68 (1), 1-18.

Tufekci, Z., and Wilson, C. (2012). Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations From Tahrir Square. *Journal of Communication* , 62 (2), 363-379.

U.S. Department of State. (2015). Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015 Iraq . Retrieved June 2, 2016, from U.S. Department of State Diplomacy in Action: <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/253137.pdf>

Uldam, J., and Vestergaard, A. (2015). Introduction: Social Media and Civic Engagement. In J. Uldam, and A. Vestergaard, *Civic Engagement and Social Media Political Participation Beyond Protest*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

UNAMI. (2013). Report on Human Rights in Iraq: July - December 2012. Baghdad: United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Human rights.

Unwin, T. (2012). *Social media and democracy: critical reflections*. University of London. London: Commonwealth Telecommunications organization.

Vaccari, C. (2012). Online Participation in Italy Contextual Influences and Political Opportunities. In E. Anduiza, M. J. Jensen, and L. Jorba (Eds.), *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide A Comparative Study* (p. 138). New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Valenzuela, S. J., and Valenzuela,, A. (1995). Chile and the Breakdown of Democracy. In H. J. Wiarda, and H. Kline, *Latin American Politics and Development*.

Vedel, T. (2003). Political Communication in the Age of the Internet. In P. J. Maarek, and G. Wolfsfeld, *Political Communication in a New Era*. New York, USA: Routledge.

Verba, S. (1996). The citizen as respondent: Sample surveys and American democracy. *American Political Science Review* , 90 (1), 1-7.

Verba, S., and Nie, N. H. (1978). *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., and Brady, H. (1995). *Voice and Equality Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Vergeer, M. (2012). Politics, elections and online campaigning: Past, present and a peek into the future. *New Media and Society* , 15 (1), 9-17.

Vucht van, W. (2012, October 18). Social media in Iraq: in search of the truth. Retrieved May 7, 2015, from Masters of Media: <http://mastersofmedia.hum.uva.nl/2012/10/18/social-media-in-iraq-in-search-of-the-truth/>

Wagner, K. M., and Gainous, J. (2013). Digital Uprising: The Internet Revolution in the Middle East. *Journal of Information Technology and Politics* , 10 (3), 261-275.

Wall, M. A. (2007). Social movements and email: expressions of online identity in the globalization protests. *new media and society* , 9 (2), 258–277.

Walzer, M. (1994). *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*. Notre Dame, NI: University of Notre Dame Press.

Ward, S., and Gibson, R. (2009). European political organizations and the internet Mobilization, participation, and change. In A. Chadwick, and P. N. Howard, *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics* (pp. 25- 39). New York, USA: Routledge.

Ward, S., Gibson, R., and Nixon, P. (2003). Parties and the Internet An overview. In R. Gibson, P. Nixon, and S. Ward, *Political Parties and the Internet Net gain* (pp. 11-38). New York: Routledge.

Watts, N. F. (2014). Democracy and Self-Determination in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In D. Romano, and M. Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria* (pp. 141- 168). New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Watts, N. F. (2016). The Spring in Sulaimani: Kurdish Protest and Political Identities. In S. J. Holliday, and P. Leech, *Political Identities and Political Uprisings in the Middle East* (pp. 37-58). Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield International Ltd

Weber, R. (2004). The Rhetoric of Positivism Versus Interpretivism: A Personal View. *MIS Quarterly* , 28 (1), iii-Xii.

Welp, Y., and Wheatley, J. (2012). The Use of Digital Media for Contentious Politics in Latin America. In E. Anduiza, M. J. Jensen, L. Jorba, E. Anduiza, M. J. Jensen, and L. Jorba (Eds.), *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide A Comparative Study* (pp. 177-199). New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.

West, D. M. (2011, June 28). *Ten Ways Social Media Can Improve Campaign Engagement and Reinvigorate American Democracy*. Retrieved January 16, 2015, from Brookings: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2011/06/28-social-media-west>

Westerman, D., Spence, P. R., and Heide, B. V. (2014). Social Media as Information Source: Recency of Updates and Credibility of Information. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* , 19, 171-183.

Whitehead, L. (2002). *Democratization Theory and Experience* . New York: Oxford University Press

Wieviorka, M. (2005). After new social movements *Social Movement Studies. Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* , 4 (1), 1-19.

Wilgenburg, W. V. (2011, May 28). HRW: Kurdish Government Not Better Than Saddam Hussein's. Retrieved May 1, 2015, from Kurdistan Center for Democracy in the Middle East: <http://www.kcdme.com/page173a.html>

Williams, C. B., and 'Jeff' Gulati, G. J. (2012). Social networks in political campaigns: Facebook and the congressional elections of 2006 and 2008. *new media and society* , 15 (1), 52-71.

Winner , L. (1988). Do Artifacts Have Politics? In M. E. Kraft, and N. J. Vig, *Technology and politics* (p. 35). Durham: Duke University Press.

Woo-Young, C. (2005). Online civic participation, and political empowerment: online media and public opinion formation in Korea. *Media Culture Society* , 27, 925.

WorldWatch Monitor. (2011, December 6). Islamic Rioters Attack Christian Shops in Kurdish North. Retrieved January 30, 2016, from WorldWatch Monitor: https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2011/12-December/article_124228.html/

Xenos, M. (2008). Not Your Father's Internet: The Generation Gap in Online Politics. In W. L. Bennett, *Civic Life Online Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth* (pp. 51-70). Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Yahyanejad, M., and Gheytnchi, E. (2012). Social Media, Dissent, and Irans Green Movement. In L. Diamond, and M. F. Plattner, *Liberation Technology Social Media and the Struggle for Democracy* (pp. 139-153). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Yesiltas, O. (2014). Iraq, Arab Nationalism, and Obstacles to Democratic Transition. In D. Romano, and M. Gurses, *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria* (pp. 41-58). New York, USA: Palgrave Macmillan.

Yildiz, K. (2004). *The Kurds in Iraq The Past, Present and Future*. London, UK: Pluto Press.

Zakaria, F. (1997, Nov/Dec). The Rise of Illiberal Democracy. *Foreign Affairs* , 76 (6), p. 22.

Zayani, M. (2014). Arab Media, Political Stagnation, and Civil Engagement: Reflections on the Eve of the Arab Spring. In L. Hudson, A. Iskandar, and M. Kirk, Media Evolution on the Eve of the Arab Spring (pp. 15-28). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Zheng, Y., and Wu, G. (2005). Information technology, public space, and collective action in China. *Comparative Political Studies* , 38, 507.

Appendix

List of Interviewees

| No | Full Name | Position | Interview place | Date |
|----|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1 | Abubaki Ali Karwani | Leader - KIU | Erbil | 25/08/2015 |
| 2 | Abubakir OmerAbdullah | Leader and MP - KIU | Erbil | 27/07/2015 |
| 3 | Adnan Mufti | Leader - PUK | Erbil | 06/08/2015 |
| 4 | Ali Hama Salih | MP - Goran | Erbil | 29/07/2015 |
| 5 | Arez Abdullah | Leader and MP - PUK | Erbil | 05/08/2015 |
| 6 | Asos Hardi | Journalist and activist | Sleman | 28/03/2015 |
| 7 | Barham Ahmed Salih | Leader - PUK | Erbil | 28/07/2015 |
| 8 | Begard Dilshad Shukrullah | Parlamentarian - PUK | Erbil | 04/08/2015 |
| 9 | Evar Ibrahim | MP - Goran | Erbil | 29/07/2015 |
| 10 | Fakhraddin Qadir Aref | Parlamentarian - KIG | Erbil | 04/08/2015 |
| 11 | Farsat Sofi Ali | Parlamentarian - KDP | Erbil | 05/08/2015 |
| 12 | Haval Abubakir | Leader - Goran | Sleman | 29/03/2015 |
| 13 | Hiwa Mirza Sabir | Leader - KIU | Erbil | 22/08/2015 |
| 14 | Mohammad Ali Taha | Parlamentarian - KDP | Erbil | 12/08/2015 |
| 15 | Mohammad Rauf | Journalist and activist | Sleman | 30/03/2015 |
| 16 | Mohammad Rauf Mohammad | Leader - KIU | Erbil | 29/07/2015 |
| 17 | Rabun Maruf | Parlamentarian - Goran | Erbil | 08/08/2015 |
| 18 | Razwan Mhamad | Political activist | Sleman | 29/03/2015 |
| 19 | Rebin Hardi | Journalist and activist | Sleman | 30/03/2015 |
| 20 | Rebwar Ali | Political activist | Sleman | 30/03/2015 |
| 21 | Rebwar Said Gul | Leader - KIU | Erbil | 11/08/2015 |
| 22 | Rewas Fayaq Hussein | Parlamentarian - PUK | Erbil | 01/07/2015 |
| 23 | Rizgar Ali Hamajan | Leader - PUK | Erbil | 11/08/2015 |
| 24 | Samir Salim Amin | Leader - KIU | Erbil | 09/08/2015 |
| 25 | San Saravan | Jorunalist and political activist | Sleman | 25/05/2015 |
| 26 | Sherko Jawdat Mustafa | Leader and MP - KIU | Erbil | 05/04/2015 |
| 27 | Yahya Nawzar Ali | Political activist | Sleman | 29/03/2015 |
| 28 | Yahya Omer Fatah | Journalist and political activist | Sleman | 28/03/2015 |